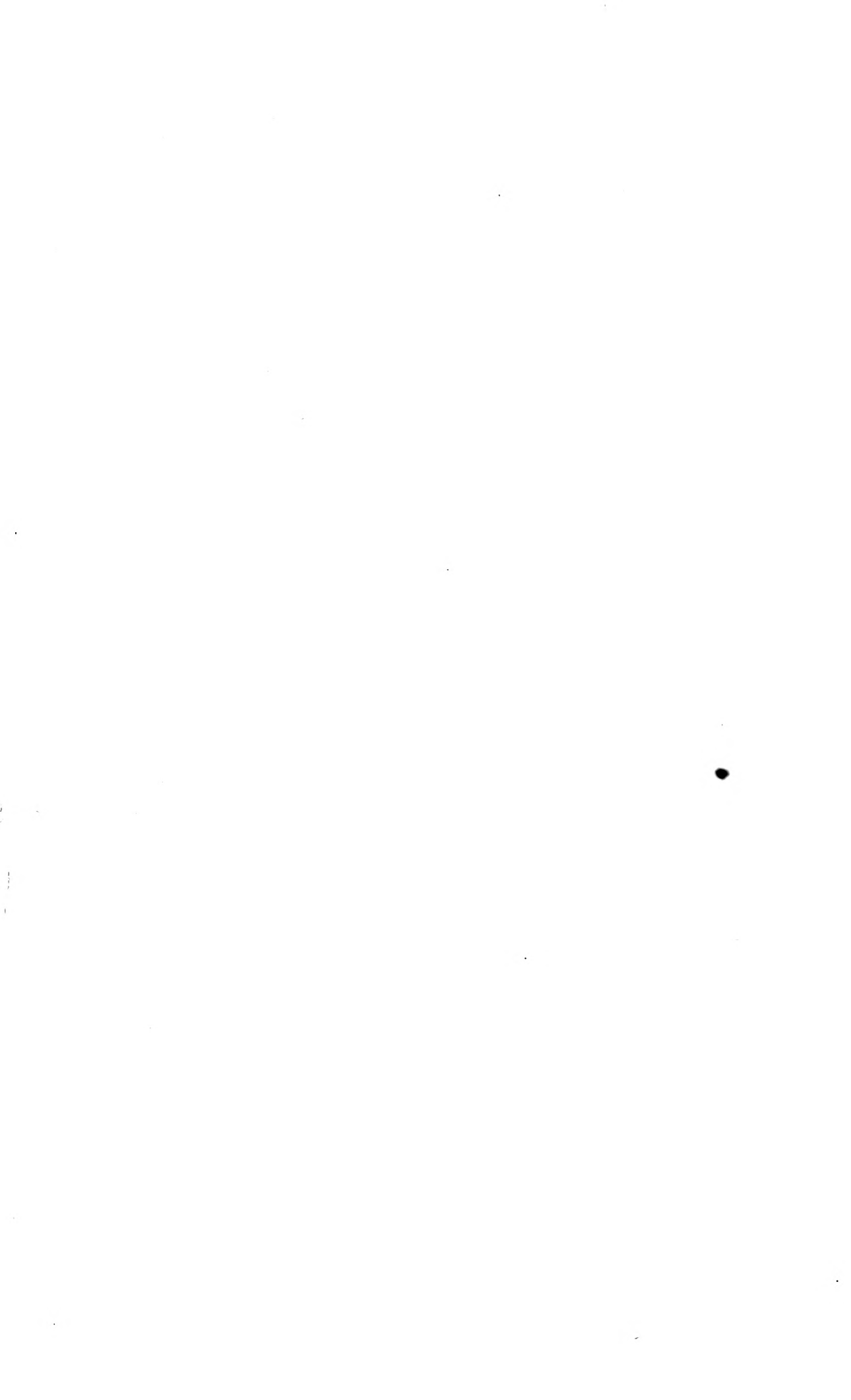




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CREATURES OF CLAY

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CREATURES OF CLAY.

CHAPTER I.

LUCE and her aunt had arrived in London. Lady Eleanor was completely in her element, visiting dressmakers and consulting with *modistes*. She believed herself artistic, and took a commensurate pride in her presumably fine and accurate taste; in reality she only succeeded in being eccentric and extravagant. A deep colour, a tinge of gold, a barbaric combination, gave her extreme delight, and she indulged her predilections at her ease.

Luce, as simple in her ideas as she was modest in the estimate of her own looks, fairly winced under the suggestions her aunt authoritatively threw out. The thickly-carpeted show-rooms, in which silks and satins hung invitingly and negligently over

the backs of chairs, gave her a shudder ; the hush and air of absorption that reigned around, as if in all the world there was nothing more important than the choice of a dress, inspired her with a sense of chill. Madame Mousseline, the obsequious milliner, with keen eyes glancing from one to the other, as only a Frenchwoman can, to catch the unexpressed thought in the countenance, disgusted her, while she felt genuine pity for the sallow-faced, languid girls, with frizzled hair and long trains, that moved slowly to and fro, their languor evaporating as soon as they entered the passage, where they quarrelled and snarled at each other in shrill angry tones, or grumbled at the stern orders of Monsieur, whose business it was to enforce obedience. Madame was all sweetness, except in Monsieur's unavoidable absence, when she was found to be as sharp in her tongue as her spouse himself. Luce, the unwilling cause of hurry or discord in the establishment, felt as though all these young girls, with their hard, joyless lives, were being offered up a holocaust on the altar of her own selfishness. She positively hated dress, hated it on account of its own in-

trinsic unimportance, and also because she had been surfeited with it from childhood, on the principle of the pastrycook's boy, who cannot bear the sight of tarts. But the sympathy on such matters, which Lady Eleanor, with every good intention, could not conjure up a spark of in her impassive niece, she found largely in Maud Hardfast, who took a lively interest in everything connected with *chiffons*. Maud, at first struck dumb with fury and disappointment when she read the letter conveying the news of Luce's engagement, which Lady Eleanor had lost no time in imparting to her dear Mrs. Hardfast, had suffered deeply, and a scene of bitter tears and recrimination took place between mother and daughter.

"My dear Maud, I told you all along you were a failure—your day is over," said Mrs. Hardfast, laying down the letter with an air of vindictive asperity.

"I haven't a rich aunt and Highview Castle at my back. Every one thinks Luce is an heiress," responded Maud, bitterly.

"I can do no more for you, my dear, and I fear your looks are rapidly going. The price of coals, too, has risen, and it is im-

possible for me to give you another new gown at present."

"I don't want a new gown," said Maud, snappishly. She had been tormenting her mother to give her a lovely blue plush with feather trimming, which she had seen at Madame Mousseline's, and it argued a piece of refined cruelty on Mrs. Hardfast's part to deny her the gown, at the same time that she reproached her with the loss of her good looks. It meant that she was to consider herself on the retired list, take second rank as an ex-beauty, and a matrimonial failure.

"If, at least, you could bring young Sterney to the point," pursued Mrs. Hardfast, calmly; "but they tell me he is quite infatuated with the new American actress; and it is certainly a week since he has been to see you."

Maud sighed. She would do anything, anything in reason, she would be deterred by no meanness, could she but secure a husband. But man-hunting is even more precarious and quite as difficult as boar-hunting; more especially because a girl cannot announce her intention of starting for the chase,

but must pretend innocence and indifference. It was five o'clock when Lady Eleanor's letter arrived. The little tea-table was drawn up near the fire, the reading-lamp, covered with a pink shade, threw a pleasant glimmer around; a muffin simmered in its hot dish; the silver kettle crowed murmurously over a spirit-lamp. Maud's hair was neatly coiled in waves of gold, and glistened warmly in the firelight, and Mrs. Hardfast, in the low armchair, plump and still good-looking, formed an agreeable picture in her tight-fitting tailor gown.

An ignorant observer might have called the scene a family idyl, yet dark vindictive thoughts filled Maud's heart, and cold and selfish calculation oppressed the matronly bosom of her mother. That evening Maud lighted her two bedroom candles (she was used to four, but from motives of economy she had been lately reduced to two very poor specimens of glaring spermaceti) and contemplated her face earnestly in the glass with the critical acumen of an artist, rather than the indulgent tenderness of a vain and pretty woman. "There is not a wrinkle," she said to herself with satisfaction, "not a grey

hair, my eyes are bright, my colour as clear as ever ; a little pencilling might improve my eyebrows, and a dash of lip-salve my lips, but otherwise I am very well, and if I cannot wheedle a man out of his name and his fortune, I should like to know who can." She retired to bed with a light heart and slept as peacefully as the veriest child. The next day she wrote a gushing and affectionate note to dear Lady Eleanor, and, on the arrival of the latter in town, made a point of calling upon her immediately. She found Lady Eleanor surrounded with patterns of stuffs, and Luce in the corner trying to read a book.

"Come here, my dear!" cried Lady Eleanor, overjoyed to find a listener, "come here ; now give me your candid opinion, do you prefer this delicate rose, or that exquisite blue, and shall the dress have a *col-à-la-Medici* or be draped *à-la-Watteau*?" Maud sat down and argued the point out carefully, exhaustively, with the profound interest of a connoisseur. Lady Eleanor was delighted. "What a treasure you are, my dear; stay and dine with us; we are going to the theatre, we can easily squeeze you into our box, and you

needn't dress, you are charming just as you are."

"I am afraid I must run away and tell mamma," said Maud, prettily apologetic, "and get a pair of gloves; she can ask cousin Jemima to sit with her you know, if she feels lonely, only I must give her time; I will be back directly." And Maud ran off. When she reached home she merely put her head in at the dining-room where Mrs. Hardfast, who expected no visitors, was sitting in a flannel dressing-gown over a very small fire, with the *débris* of a cup of servants' tea, and a thick slice of bread and butter, before her.

"I'm going out!" cried Maud, "to dine with Lady Eleanor; send Jones upstairs please and lend me your sable cloak."

Mrs. Hardfast serenely rang the bell, gave the desired order, and, remarking that a cut of cold meat from the servants' supper, and a glass of warm whiskey and water, would be all she should require, as Miss Maud did not dine at home, resumed her interrupted nap, and dozed off into a dream of bliss, in which she saw herself mother-in-law to a duke. Maud soon returned to Lady Eleanor's house

looking most captivating in a soft evening dress of pale blue stuff, cosily covered by her mother's sable cloak.

Lady Eleanor said in a pleased tone, "Why, child, you have dressed and look very nice;" and Luce, who wore a plain black gown, and later in the evening sat in the back of the box, was entirely eclipsed by her friend's radiance. Mr. Sterney and Lord Gossamer, an elderly man, who were of the party, addressed all their remarks to Maud; and Arthur Sterney, for the evening, forgot the American actress and her wonderful antics. After this Lady Eleanor used to send every day for Maud. Either a little queer twisted note scrawled in pencil invited her to lunch, or the carriage came to fetch her to the dress-makers, where her presence was required, or Luce would herself appear, armed with an urgent message from her aunt. These visits generally resulted in something agreeable. for Maud, she was taken to theatres, and to suppers afterwards, and a gown which Lady Eleanor had intended for Luce was bestowed upon her, or she was solaced with a dozen pairs of gloves or a pretty fan, as a reward for her good nature and amiability. The

latter, usually considered a virtue, in this instance was so decidedly an exotic, cultivated with care and attention, that it might rather be classed as a vice, twin-sister to that most subtle enemy of the human race, dissimulation. Maud played her cards well certainly, and duly received her recompense. Luce had at first felt a little afraid of her, fearing angry reproaches, but when she discovered that Maud smiled kindly, that her words were affectionate and generous, and her claws, if she had any, sheathed in velvet and carefully kept out of sight, she warmed towards her, and innocently prattled of her prospects and her lover.

“ You know, Maud, I felt a little ashamed of myself at first,” she said one day, as the two girls washed their hands amicably in Luce’s bedroom; “ I fancied you might think I had flattered Dick, or manœuvred to catch him, but, if you knew, it all came about so simply and ——”

“ And charmingly, you Arcadian ; why it is a very nice marriage for everybody ; he is amazingly good-looking, though perhaps he will get too stout by-and-bye, and you are sure to be very rich ; it is an excellent match.”

“An excellent match!” the happy smile died away on Luce’s lips; “why I haven’t a sixpence; my uncle only took me in out of charity, and Dick doesn’t want money—indeed personally I should prefer to be poor, provided Dick could have all his comforts.”

“Well, my dear, every one calls you an heiress (just lend me your brush, will you? thanks! what a nice brush, the bristles are so long), and of course Mr. Carrol has heard what every one says.”

“An heiress!” Luce sat down aghast on the edge of her bed.

“Why, you are not going to faint are you? I wish somebody would call *me* an heiress, shouldn’t I have a lot of offers then, and shouldn’t I lead them a dance, just—Luce you are a little fool!”

“I assure you, Maud,” said Luce, seriously, “you are entirely mistaken in your ideas, and Mr. Carrol must certainly be aware of the truth, the settlements will show that.”

“Ah, yes, of course, the settlements,” said the other girl, laughing, and lifting the hand holding the ivory hairbrush so as to display the curves of her graceful figure; “but then he hadn’t seen the settlements

when he proposed to you, he could only guess."

"If I thought ——" Luce rose suddenly, setting her mouth with fixed determination.

"You wouldn't make a scene? why, my dear, you're the luckiest girl in the world; you'll have lots of money and the man you love. Why, of course, I saw through you at once. You were in love, abjectly, meanly in love, with Dick Carrol from the very beginning."

Luce hid her face.

"All men are mercenary, dear—that's nothing new."

"And what are women, pray?" said Luce, lifting her large, sad eyes.

"What men make them," promptly answered Maud, with a harsh laugh. "Don't you think I would be good, and innocent, and stupid, as you are, dear, if I could afford it—but I can't. I have got a certain game to play, and I try to play it to the best of my ability. You must fight men with their own weapons, if you wish to succeed. If they cheat you, you must cheat them in return."

"What a horrible world it is!"

“Not a bit horrible when one has plenty of money.”

Dick also had once called it a horrible world, but then he regarded it from quite another point of view; it was horrible to *him*, because he opposed his own will to the inevitable, and beat himself hopelessly against an iron fate. It was horrible to *her*, because she found deceit and treachery, where her heart longed to trust and love with all a woman's power of absolute self-devotion.

“Why do you say such things?”

“Because they are true. I've no patience with people who try to throw dust in their own eyes. Tell *yourself* the truth, even if no one else cares to do it. I'll be bound you can tell yourself harder truths than any other person. There are certain corners in one's own mind, certain little sins and weaknesses, that are hidden from one's dearest friends, but that *we* know—you and I—about each other respectively. I make myself no illusions, you had better do the same. Illusions are the most expensive things in the world; they cost no end of time and money, and in the end they always

give way and let you down with a nasty jarring flop.”

Luce did not answer. Possibly there might be some truth in Maud's jeering words, she thought, and yet, if it were so, could she bear to part with her illusions? She decided that she could not. Life's young ideals are more precious than life, for what is life worth without ideals? and youth stripped of the accompaniment of happy anticipations is only premature old age. Luce felt years younger than Maud, primed with her precocious wisdom.

“I'm very glad I was brought up as I was,” continued Maud, reflectively; “what a mistake it is to keep girls from all contact of real life, believing poverty to be a thing of soups and flannel and condescending charity; love an affair of two superlatively romantic hearts, instead of a matter of digestion or temperament: for, in the first place, love is never mutual; it is impossible to keep two people for long exactly at the same pitch of fever heat; and as for truth, that's entirely comparative, and depends upon the accepted notion of society at the moment. Men don't cheat at cards, but they always

lie to women. I suppose a little puritan like you would think that wrong? yet they all do it. I even defy the most sober and faithful of husbands not to indulge in a sly flirtation if he got the opportunity, say at Boulogne, or in the Highlands, or somewhere where he would have no chance of being found out."

"Don't, pray don't, Maud!" cried Luce, putting her hands to her ears. "I don't want to hear any more."

"Why not? Is it necessary to appear in all one's naked truth before the world? Need mamma say she dyes her pretty brown hair, or I tell you that my gown is turned? and that I dust the drawing-room because we don't keep a regular housemaid? or that I improve my figure, or anything of that kind? Stuff! every one knows there must be some kind of pretence in the world, only the pretence lies in pretending you don't make a pretence. There is the difference between you and me—I'm natural, you're not."

Luce, her heart smarting with the pin-pricks Maud had been so lavishly showering upon her during the last few moments,

jumped up and declared she would not stay any longer, and at that instant Lady Eleanor's voice was heard calling up the stairs, "Luce! Maud! Girls, *do* come down at once; I want you *directly*."

The girls flew down. Lady Eleanor held a telegram in her hand, and appeared discomposed.

"What is it?" said Maud, sidling up to her affectionately. "Won't Madame Mousseline agree to your terms, or has she sent home a horror of a misfit?"

"Much worse than that," said Lady Eleanor, gravely, keeping her eye the while on Luce; "Dick Carrol has got into trouble. I don't know what it is—something to do with the election, I believe—but Mr. Highview begs that we will return immediately."

"What a nuisance!" said Maud, quickly; "and you had asked some people to dine to-morrow, can't you put it off?"

"Impossible! Mr. Highview does not explain, but he talks of criminal proceedings."

Luce gave a gasp, and suddenly sat down.

CHAPTER II.

BRUCE meanwhile having plunged deeply into the studies, which his visit to Highview had somewhat interrupted, heard nothing of these exciting events. He was just now particularly engaged taking notes at the British Museum, and was absent from home the greater part of the day, much to Mrs. Flinks's curiosity, who confided to the long-suffering Eves that she thought he had embarked upon a love affair. "He's such a quiet gentleman," said Eves, "'taint in nature likely with him."

"The quiet ones are the worst; poor dear Mr. Flinks couldn't say 'bo' to a goose, but he was deep and sly, and after his death I read all his papers, and found out such dreadful things."

“And knowing that you’re always hankering after the men?”

“Well, bad as they are,” the widow laughed, “life’s but a dull business without them.”

“It’s a tough business with them,” answered Eves, sententiously.

“You are an old marplot,” said her mistress cheerfully; “you haven’t a bit of ‘go’ in you or you wouldn’t pass all your life washing up dishes.”

“Washing up in peace is a trifle better than being cuffed over the head by a man who has a legal right to get drunk, and make you work for him.”

“Oh, if you are that kind of woman I’ve nothing to say; I should like to see any one cuff *me*,” the widow tossed her head coquettishly.” Needless to say that when that afternoon Dick Carrol drove up in a hansom, carrying a small bag in his hand, the lively widow flew to open the door, and received him with familiar *empressement*.

“Bruce out?” said Dick, soberly, scarcely looking at the landlady, and seeming weary and harassed.

“He will be in this evening, I suppose?”

“Then I’ll wait.” He tossed the cabman his fare and walked in, while the landlady smiling and talking sought to conduct him into her sitting-room.

“There is a fire here, and the newspaper,” she said. “Mr. Bruce does not keep up his fire now, as he is out all day, and you might find it chilly. Shall I bring you some tea and a muffin? I’ve very nice muffins—I think you have tasted them already.”

“No, thank you, I don’t want any tea, and I’ll go straight to Mr. Bruce’s room.”

“As you please, sir,” said the landlady, nettled.

Dick sat down in the leather arm-chair by the table, as usual littered with the student’s books and papers, and laid his aching head on his crossed arms. Mrs. Flinks, finding him hopelessly silent, departed, sending up the faithful Eves, who soon struck a light and made a brisk little fire. The dull January day neared its close, the acrid air, yellow and fog-laden, seemed heavy and oppressive to Dick, whose lungs were accustomed to breathe the fresh country atmosphere; the room had a disused, cold, and uncomfortable look. Generally untidy, the furniture poor

and common, and somewhat frayed and old as it was, yet with Bruce present, his pipe and his talk, it had never seemed dull, nor had Dick previously experienced the feeling of chill and gloom which now oppressed him. He was sorry he had refused the landlady's tea, or rather he wished he had something stronger, something that would warm his chilly blood. He remembered his bag, seized, opened it, and found therein to his delight a small flask containing brandy. He drank some and felt better. So much better that he dragged the arm-chair nearer the fire, ensconced himself more comfortably, took out his cigar-case, and began to smoke. He was already in a more genial frame of mind when Bruce, slowly climbing the stairs, turned the handle of the door and discovered him reading an old newspaper by the light of a bit of candle he had found on the chimneypiece.

“Dick! I'm glad to see you. Have you been here long, and why are you sitting in the dark? Let me ring for the lamp,” he said, holding out his hand, while he clasped some fat books to his breast with the other. “And how goes the election? The eventful

day is approaching I suppose; I know nothing, remember, for you haven't had the grace to write to me lately."

"Bruce, old fellow," said Dick, hoarsely, "I'm in an awful mess, I want you to help me."

Bruce stared.

"What—not another woman?"

"Much worse than that. I thought things were as bad as they could be then, but this is infinitely worse. I shall be disgraced, ruined."

"Disgraced, ruined—what do you mean?"

Bruce put down the books, divested himself of his greatcoat and hat, and drew a chair beside his friend. Dick spoke in a slow hollow voice utterly unlike his own, and lay back, gloomily looking up to the ceiling, and avoiding Julian's eyes.

"I mean what I say; the most extraordinary things have occurred; everything is against me; I'm trapped, hedged in, done for. I feel dazed and stupid. I can't tell you how it has all come about, for I scarcely know myself. I only know that unless something can be done, and directly, I am downright ruined."

“ You have told me nothing as yet—what is it ? ”

“ There’s a warrant out against me for theft, for obtaining money under false pretences—I—Julian, it’s a knockdown blow.”

Julian laughed. And the laugh did more good to his poor friend than the brandy, or the cigar, or any amount of commonplace sympathy and commiseration could have afforded.

“ You, Dick ? it is a practical joke, I suppose. Why do you look so serious about it ? ”

“ A practical joke ! I wish it were. It is serious—most serious. Do you think I could joke on such a subject ? ”

And yet Dick felt that what presented itself in so risible a fashion to Bruce could scarcely be as grave a matter as he had imagined.

“ Well, but this theft, why are you accused of it ? ”

“ From political motives, I suppose, personal spite too, who knows ? ”

“ Then it is ? ”

“ Sir Hilary Fenchurch.”

“ I presume you can easily clear yourself ? ”

“Appearances are deucedly against me.”

“But the motive, my dear fellow, always seek the motive, what motive could *you* have had?”

“They found a cause for that too.”

“Indeed!” Bruce’s eyes lost their far-off look, the pupils dilated, he became as interested, as in the hunt after some recondite bit of knowledge calculated to throw clear light upon the darkened pathway of historical research. “You say?”

“Well, it seems Sir Hilary gave his wife a pearl necklace, which she took to her jewellers at West Thorpe to get mended; she had broken it, and wished her husband not to know this. Stupid fool that I was! I undertook to deliver the necklace, forgot all about it, left it in my pocket, and it can’t be found. On explanation, the jewellers said I had called for it, and of course I am responsible.”

“I am afraid you are indeed. How could you be so careless?”

“I cannot think. Then it turned out that Lady Fenchurch confessed to having met me on that day, and having told me she had left the necklace, and ——”

“The jeweller was mistaken that is all. He must know that you would not take a pearl necklace. What object could you possibly have?”

“Unfortunately a racehorse of mine broke down just about that time. I had some heavy bets to pay, and the supposition is that I took the necklace to pay the bets.”

“I confess this appears extremely unlikely; but of course you know what became of it?”

“I must have lost or else it was taken by one of the servants; I won’t accuse them; besides, it may have been jerked out of my pocket.”

Bruce stroked his chin. “But the obtaining money under false pretences, how do they make that out?”

“Easily enough I cashed a cheque of my aunt’s a day or two afterwards.”

“She gave it you of course,” put in Bruce eagerly.

“She did not. My uncle gave it me, but he says he does not remember it.”

“Your uncle! Impossible! A strange lapse of memory.”

“Isn’t it? My aunt always hated me.”

“It’s unnatural, unheard of; well, you must

defend yourself. Truth will be made plain."

"You forget—the warrant."

"Is of no avail against an innocent man."

"But I have not proved my innocence."

"The deuce! must a man be thought guilty till he is proved innocent?"

"The long and short of it is, that I may be locked up in jail any day, and the mere disgrace of that, even if I prove my innocence, is enough to brand me for life."

"And Miss Luce, what does she say."

"Luce! Oh, I had forgotten her. Poor dear, she is well rid of me; of course this breaks her engagement."

"I cannot see that; if she is a true woman she will love you all the better for your misfortunes."

"Even if that were so, her people would not allow it. You can't think what a state the county is in; there are placards stuck about everywhere, 'Who stole the pearl necklace?' 'Vote for Sir Hilary Fenchurch, the honest man!' and squibs, and pictures; it was a great card they played. I can never go near the place again; I hurried away and came here, and you will let me stay a bit,

old fellow, won't you, till I know how the land lies. I knew I could trust you. I knew *you* wouldn't turn against me."

Bruce rose, took one of Dick's hands, which hung limply over the edge of the chair, and pressed it warmly. "Certainly, you can trust me."

He walked away a few paces, strangling the lump that seemed to rise in his throat, coughed once or twice, then returning said in a cheerful tone, "Well, we will have some dinner at any rate; I have an enormous appetite, and I dare say you have not eaten much to-day."

Dick shook his head dolefully. Eves was then promptly summoned. She brought in the lamp, and laid the table-cloth, which presently gave a more lively aspect to the room, while Bruce, slipping on his beloved and shabby grey jacket, tried by appearing unconcerned and cheerful to raise his friend's spirits. Thanks to the food, which though plain was excellently cooked, and the warmth, and the genial kindness and affection which was evident through all the student's clumsy and innocent efforts to please and cheer, Dick gradually reco-

vered some of his ordinary light-heartedness, and soon was able to talk with more ease and equanimity.

Bruce inquired after old Mrs. Carrol.

“Poor dear, she was in bed when I left,” said Dick, tenderly; “all this knocked her up, and Aunt Vincent would scarcely let me enter her room to say good-bye. She watched over her like a dragon, whispering to me as I went in, ‘Now mind, if you excite your grandmother, you will *kill* her. You had better not have her death on your shoulders with all the rest.’”

“And what did your grandmother say?”

“Very little; she squeezed my hand hard and looked at me with her kind old eyes, and when I was going out she said, ‘God bless you, Dick!’ I wouldn’t have pained her for the world—poor, poor old Granny!” Dick buried his face in his hands.

“She trusts you, Dick, or she wouldn’t have said ‘God bless you;’ take heart.”

“I have been ungrateful, I know, and taken her money without any thanks, and let her think of me, and plan and stint herself in her little fancies and luxuries, to save for me; but never! no, Julian, never would I

have stolen her money, or cheated my aunt!"

"Of course not; nobody who knows you believes it."

"I think Aunt Vincent does, really; but how that maudlin ass, my uncle, could say he forgot—I can't account for it."

"I can—his wife's influence. You have often told me he was afraid of her."

"Yes; he stood in mortal fear—pah! isn't it contemptible?"

"Human nature, at its worst, *is* contemptible; the more wonder that we care so much as we do for the opinion of the many."

"I can't philosophise; honestly, I do care awfully what people say of me. How do you think Luce will take it?"

"You have written to her?"

"Not a line; I didn't know what to say. She will believe me guilty like the rest, and Lady Eleanor is as proud as a peacock."

"You should have asked her to trust you."

"What! against appearances?"

"Certainly—you asked me."

"But you are a man, and my friend."

"Believe me, if you do trust a woman, trust her thoroughly; put her on her honour;

appeal to her fine feelings ; she will always rise to the occasion. I think, myself, that Miss Luce will prove your staunchest ally."

"I could not ask a girl to go against the wishes of her people, it wouldn't be fair; and what have I got to offer her. You know as well as I do, that, though nominally my grandmother's heir, everything is in her own power. She may leave me a beggar—it will not be Mrs. Vincent's fault if she doesn't—disgraced, ruined. Why should a woman care even to speak to me again?"

"Not all women I grant you, but some might, a small minority, and I believe Miss Luce to be in that minority."

"She is unselfish enough for anything, but she would be a fool to stick to me now. If I get out of this affair I shall emigrate to Australia—try to be forgotten ——"

"Meanwhile, Sir Hilary walks over for the county; how about all your political aspirations, your plans of usefulness?"

"Every man for himself. I must think of myself now."

"Have you retired, then, from the contest?"

“I have done nothing ; I left it all to my agent.”

“And he will fill his pockets?”

“Very likely ; I don’t care.” Dick relapsed into gloom.

“And because Sir Hilary, a fond and foolish old man, gratifies a bit of jealous spite (jealous love for his wife is at the bottom of all this, I’ll be bound. Wasn’t the Trojan war kindled for a woman’s sake?), your nineteenth-century Helen spoils an election.”

“And a man’s whole prospects in life.”

“Exactly. It is the same thing—quality the same, quantity differs. Well, because of this fit of spite, justifiable enough in electioneering times, you are going to give up everything, hurry to the dogs, and cry *Peccavi* !”

“I can’t help myself.”

“Was there ever an incurable ill? Death is the only irrevocable thing, and all philosophers are agreed that death is not an evil—a mere state of transition.”

“I feel as if I could cut my throat !”

“To-day—and to-morrow when the sun shines, and Miss Luce writes you a pretty

letter, and the accusation falls to the ground, you will wish to live for ever."

"Pooh! you don't understand."

"Yes, I do." Bruce's voice grew low and mellow. "I have had a hard life myself; have known poverty and struggles and disappointments. I have the nervous temperament which, sometimes lifted above the earth, innumerable times falls heavily back in miserable depression, the dyspeptic tendencies of the student who neglects his digestion, and grudges himself the luxury of fresh air. I have few friends and no protection or interest; for all love and family ties I have an old mother who is plain and dowdy and antiquated and frail enough to die any day, but who is sacred and perfect in my eyes because of her belief in and affection for me; and yet, though I am poor, and forced to work hard, and have no particular prospects, I never wish to die. I am worse off than you, and yet *you* talk of dying."

"To live disgraced is unbearable."

"Why should you live disgraced? This cloud will pass away. You will learn to smile as you think of your distress to-day. Now, Dick, sleep it off; here is a bed-

candle. You will speak differently to-morrow."

And yet, when Dick reluctantly retired in search of the slumbers his exhausted mental and physical nature required so urgently, Julian Bruce, moving with the cautious quiet steps of a careful woman, sat far into the night, planning, thinking, and writing letters. He had succeeded in restoring in some degree his friend's courage, but at the bottom of his own heart he was terribly anxious.

CHAPTER III.

LADY ELEANOR invited Maud to accompany her on the return to Highview Castle, and the latter, who was glad of an opportunity for a junket, and ready for any agreeable emergency, gladly consented. Who could tell what might not result? she might make some desirable acquaintance, might render herself so necessary to Lady Eleanor as to induce that great lady to adopt, or at least chaperone, her, throw the glamour of her magnificent presence and countenance around her, and cause people, in the fact of her ladyship's bosom friend, to forget the existence of penniless Miss Hardfast. Maud believed in the power of the unforeseen. Pleasant things must be in store for her, and the unexpected would resolve into the desirable. So Maud joyfully packed her trunks, kissed

her mother without great regret, leaving her to a serious study of the house-bills, and a deep consideration of the way in which expenses could be still further cut down, and a few disagreeable creditors disposed of, and departed with her maid for the stately regions of Highview Castle. The three ladies travelled in a compartment specially reserved, which an affable guard, duly tipped with a half-crown, locked and unlocked with enormous ceremony. In the next carriage sat the two maids and the footman, chatting merrily and sucking oranges to while away the time. The footman got out at every station to inquire if her ladyship required anything, and her ladyship usually did require something. Once it was a newspaper, precisely the one she wished for having been omitted from the pile on her lap; once it was some water for Squib, the little toy-terrier, who had barked himself hoarse out of the window at the hedges and trees as they flew past; once it was to send a telegram to Mr. Highview, and once to get the hot-water tin refilled. Lady Eleanor was nervous, and her nerves found vent in extra fidgetiness and exactions. She was

ignorant of what awaited her, and she resented her ignorance. Mr. Highview merely telegraphed to her to return; he had omitted to explain anything, and satisfied none of her legitimate curiosity. She was not accustomed to be ordered about in such fashion, and she chafed at her helplessness. Luce leant back in a corner very quiet and very silent; and Maud, on whom fell the whole burden of entertainment, sought in vain to arrest Lady Eleanor's attention by little stories, or allusions to the news and scandal contained in the papers.

“So I see Mrs. Lovejoy is to be married at last. Poor Colonel Jones!”

“I wonder if Mr. Highview will have remembered to send the carriage—ten to one he has forgotten,” sighed Lady Eleanor.

“Just listen, is not this a delicious description of the dress the Princess wore ——”

“Criminal proceedings! what can that mean, Maud? I thought a criminal was some low kind of creature—like a tramp or a navvy.”

“Let me see, there was Tichborne,” said Maud, reflectively, “and Warren Hastings; I read something about him in history ——”

“History! that’s all over and done with. There are no great criminals now—everything is vulgar and commonplace. And how a gentleman, heir to a large fortune, could have found it necessary to do anything wrong—I mean vulgarly wrong—(peccadilloes, little fashionable *esclandres* don’t count)—what do you think, Luce?”

“I don’t think anything—we must wait till we know the facts.”

“That is so like you, Luce”—Lady Eleanor drew her furs closer with a pettish movement; “you always talk like a professor of logic—‘*till we know the facts*’—why we can’t wonder when we *know*, of course—but then you are dreadfully impassive.”

“You must make allowances for Luce,” whispered Maud in Lady Eleanor’s ear; “she is so fond of him, you know.”

Luce heard the whisper and shrank within herself.

“It was very inconsiderate of Mr. Highview,” proceeded Lady Eleanor, querulously; “there is the trousseau half ordered, and what the tradespeople will think of my sudden departure, leaving them all to their own devices, I am sure I can’t imagine.”

“You can write to them when you arrive.”

“Of course, no one ever minds what trouble I am put to,” said Lady Eleanor, crossly.

“I will write the letters, dear Lady Eleanor.”

“Upon my word you are a very obliging girl, Maud. Pray hold Squib for a few minutes: he scratches holes with his little paws in my fur.” Maud held Squib and was forced to put up gracefully with the havoc he soon made of the sable cloak she had prudently taken with her.

The carriage had not been forgotten; another footman met Lady Eleanor at the station, and when the train stopped handed her a note from her husband. The note was very short and unsatisfactory and told her only that the writer had ridden into West Thorpe on business, and would be back about six o'clock. “Four o'clock only!” said Lady Eleanor, consulting her watch, “we shall have two hours more to wait before we know what it's all about. Yes, drive on Jenkins, there is nothing else.”

Lady Eleanor found the drawing-room looking as beautiful as ever. The palms had

even grown a little, Maud declared, and sweet-smelling hyacinths and narcissi filled the *jardinières* and silver vases on the tables. "Mould is not a bad gardener," said Lady Eleanor, looking round complacently; "here, Luce, do you see, that is the very pale pink camellia we admired at Lady Prankish's. Why, where's the child?"

"Gone upstairs, I think," said Maud, quietly; "she is nervous and upset."

"Nervous!" sneered Lady Eleanor; "girls in *my* day didn't know the meaning of nerves."

"Ah, but you are different; there are not many people like *you*."

Somewhat mollified her ladyship read her letters, examined the bill of fare, rang for the housekeeper and gave her sundry orders, then drank tea and eat heartily of buttered cake, after which she felt equal to meeting Mr. Highview, and hearing a full, true, and particular account of all that had occurred.

Mr. Highview dismounted at the stables and hurried quickly into his wife's sitting-room, where he found her sitting with Maud over the tea-table.

“Shall I go?” said Maud, alertly, jumping up.

“Certainly not, my dear; I look upon you quite as one of the family; you can hear everything.”

Maud subsided into her chair with a smile—she certainly had every intention of hearing what was to be said.

“A most unlucky affair—upset me extremely. I’m very glad you are home again,” said Mr. Highview, embracing his wife: the latter could not afford time to be affectionate.

“You have alarmed us all most dreadfully—quick—don’t lose a moment and tell us.”

Mr. Highview proceeded to explain, Lady Eleanor interrupting him every moment with questions and exclamations.

“Did he really steal the necklace?” she asked, dropping her voice mysteriously.

“Certainly not. I do not believe it for an instant.”

“But appearances are sadly against him.”

“Well, it has lost him the election; a very mean trick on the part of his opponents, I must say.”

“And disagreeable for Luce.”

“Poor Luce! by the way, where is she? I hope the dear child hasn’t taken it terribly to heart.”

“Pooh! She’s very well quit of such a wretch. Of course the engagement is over?”

“Had we not better wait?”

“Wait—when the young man is under a cloud. You have no consideration for your niece.”

“Well, I am sure, my dear,” excusing himself, “I only wish to do what is best—the poor girl must not be made unhappy.”

“A marriage that does not come off is no great affair, and in this case not an ounce of blame can attach to the girl—you don’t suppose women generally marry their first lover, do you? Remember, Luce has only been out one year—she’ll get over this directly and make just as good a match, I’ll be bound—but the interests of the county will suffer; you couldn’t stand yourself, could you?”

“Certainly not—besides, no one but Sir Hilary has a chance now.”

“It is most provoking, most provoking.” Lady Eleanor tapped her heel against the

floor, and rested her chin on her hand meditatively.

“Nothing to be done—nothing—nobody—I *insist* on your standing, Mr. Highview; it can do no harm, it may do good. We shall have a claim on the Government if you win the election, and perhaps they will make you a peer—come, cheer up, believe me they will listen to you, and you have several days still to spare.”

Maud now slipped from the room and ran up stairs to Luce, whom she found restlessly pacing backwards and forwards.

“He has come—Mr. Highview has come. Oh, it is dreadful, Luce—Mr. Carrol has stolen a necklace of Lady Fenchurch’s (they always said he admired her, so it was doubly queer), and embezzled money, and he has gone away, and the election is lost, and Lady Eleanor is in such a state.”

“Gone!” Only one word seemed to pierce an entrance into Luce’s mind. “Gone, did you say, where, not with ——?”

“Not with any one, you little fool,” laughed Maud, stealing a look at herself in the glass. “Why he has only made himself scarce, disappeared—very wisely too, while there is

such a hue and cry after him. I suppose he will come back some day, but just at present discretion is the better part of valour."

"Maud, how *can* you laugh—isn't it terrible?"

"I dare say he will clear himself, people exaggerate so; meanwhile, you had better dry your eyes, for there is no chance for you."

"How do you mean?"

"Lady Eleanor has decided to break off the engagement—I should not be surprised if she has found you another husband already ——"

"What? break off the engagement!"

"Yes, you white-faced ninny; don't look so surprised, and open your big eyes; how can you marry a man who is accused of goodness knows what dreadful things?"

"But he is innocent!"

"That we cannot tell—there is a slur upon him now, that even you, dear little fond creature, cannot remove—your love for him will be finely tried, I expect.

"I shall not change," said Luce, very calmly.

"No; but Lady Eleanor is mistress here, remember."

“I must see him; I must hear from his own lips what he wishes; I shall not give him up till then,” said Luce, passionately.

“Bravo! Luce, I declare you show plenty of courage. But if I were you I would not presume too much upon it; you must give in sooner or later—why struggle?”

“Have you any idea where he is to be found?”

“None whatever, and if I had I should not tell you. There is not a bit of use in stirring up mud.”

“Where can he be—will his grandmother know?” continued Luce, as if to herself, “poor, poor old lady, it will kill her. Oh Maud, she was so proud of him, so devoted to him ——”

“He certainly seems a nice specimen of a young man ——”

“It is some hideous mistake, I am sure. Oh Maud, dear Maud, do help me to unravel it. Dick is a gentleman, he is incapable of anything mean ——”

“He has got a good advocate in you at least,” said Maud, almost roused to admiration of her friend’s constancy; “but it doesn’t pay to take up the losing cause—the poor

fellow has evidently no luck—just at such a time, too, it was hard lines, I must say ——”

“I can’t desert him, at any rate.”

“You poor dear, I don’t believe you will be consulted.”

“My uncle is a just man. It is not just to trample on the unfortunate. Besides, if *I* do not show my trust in Dick how can I expect it of any one else. Maud, dear Maud, don’t you forsake me at least.”

“I won’t forsake you,” answered Maud, shortly, “but I can’t persuade you into folly.”

“I will be careful, I will not be foolish. Go down, dear, now—go and talk to my uncle; find out all you can—do, there’s a kind girl;” then with a pardonable touch of flattery she added, “you are so clever, you know.”

Maud departed, and Luce was left alone. She drew near the window, clasped her hands, and looked out into the calm, clear night. She did not falter or hesitate in her thoughts, the path lay distinctly before her. She had now an opportunity of testing her love, of proving the truth of her protestations, of earning the eternal gratitude of the

man to whom she was engaged. If she could but gain one kind look, one loving word, she would be amply repaid. Men's hearts in time of trouble were soft and malleable—she might effect an entrance into Dick's so complete that no effort could dislodge her. A kind of humble thankfulness filled her soul that she should have been chosen to take the part of comforter. It suited with her gentle nature, tenacious in its gentleness, innocently trustful, unfaltering in its simple faith. The first thing to be done was to place herself in communication with him. But how? He was not at Long Leam. A letter addressed there might lie for an uncertain period forgotten on the table. He was not likely to leave an address with his Uncle Vincent. Where could he be? in which direction was he likely to go for comfort and shelter? As she thus pondered she remembered Bruce. Naturally Dick's first impulse would be to take refuge with his kind, unworldly friend, to whom ordinary prejudices were as nothing. She must write to Bruce. Drawing pen and ink towards her, she composed her letter.

“DEAR MR. BRUCE.

“I have just heard that Mr. Carrol is in some dreadful trouble. I am sure that you, his best friend, are with him. Will you send me his address, and news of his welfare; and assure him, though this is almost unnecessary, that I am truly unhappy, and *entirely* unchanged. Pray forgive my troubling you,

And, believe me,

“Yours very truly,

“LUCE WINDERMERE.”

When the letter was written and stamped, Luce rang for her maid, and desired that it might be sent at once to the post. He must receive the letter to-morrow, and if he had ever doubted her he could doubt no longer. Luce, happy in her trustfulness, astonished her uncle and aunt that evening by the calmness of her behaviour, and her appearance at dinner with an unruffled brow.

“She is a heartless girl,” confided Lady Eleanor to Maud, who scarcely knew what to think, the dignity of sustained resolution being an incomprehensible mystery to her. Mr. Highview, who received Luce’s earnest feverish entreaties to be allowed to drive

over and visit old Mrs. Carrol on the morrow, thought differently.

“Just lend me the dogcart, uncle—you need not spare me a groom, or I can ride if more convenient.”

“Will it not be painful to you, child?” He hesitated, feeling compassion for the slight young girl going out bravely to her fate. “Why should you wish it? No one can expect it of you.”

“What! not Granny? (you know I always call her Granny.) *She* will expect it. Pray, pray let me go! I shall be far more unhappy if you keep me here.”

Mr. Highview glanced towards his wife. She was busy talking to Maud—they were planning a new table decoration. He heard Luce’s short quick breathing, and noticed her eye, brilliant with feverish impatience.

“Let me go, please!” she said again, with agonized entreaty.

“Very well, dear—start before breakfast. Sultan shall be saddled and ready for you; only I think, perhaps, you had better say nothing about it to your aunt.”

Luce thanked him with a silent kiss.

CHAPTER IV.

As soon as it was light Luce crept downstairs and went round to the stables. Sultan was ready, champing the bit in his stall—the groom approached touching his hat. “I am to go with you, miss, was Mr. Highview’s orders.”

“Very well,” said Luce, not displeased at the escort ; “make haste and put me on—I am in a hurry.”

She mounted lightly, and with a bound Sultan left the stable-yard. He snorted with pleasure when he found himself in the fresh morning air, controlled only by his mistress’s light hand, while they cantered along the dewy lanes. The weather had been unusually mild, a spring-like scent of earth and leaves floated in the air, here and there prim-roses glimmered under the hedges, and busy

rooks cawed and fluttered about the freshly-ploughed sod. Luce experienced a sense of pleasurable relief—the long easy swing of the horse's stride suited her irritable nerves. She was in action, she was straining towards the desired end, she was doing what he would have wished, she was sure ; how far preferable to the time she must otherwise have spent waiting helplessly in Lady Eleanor's close, heavily-scented drawing-room, while the hours crawled slowly along and no news came. The sixteen miles were accomplished without fatigue to mistress or horse, and Luce rode into the stable-yard at Long Leam as the clock struck ten. At this hour Mrs. Carrol was usually in her sitting-room, alone. Luce could not, she thought, have chosen a more auspicious moment. She dismounted, and walked round to the hall-door. The grey-haired butler smiled and seemed surprised when he saw who was his early visitor.

“Is it you, Miss?” he said, with the respectful familiarity of an old retainer.

“Yes. Can I see Mrs. Carrol?” Luce stepped into the hall, which seemed to her dear and homelike.

“Mrs. Carrol!” said the butler, hesitating; “not Mrs. Vincent Carrol?”

“No, no, Granny; old Mrs. Carrol.”

“She is in bed,” he said, putting on the conventional visage of woe.

“She is not ill, I hope?”

“Well, I don’t rightly know; but no one sees her except Mrs. Vincent; you will have to ask her leave first.”

“Then ask her leave, quick; say I have ridden over on purpose to see Mrs. Carrol, and I cannot go away without speaking to her.”

“I will see what I can do,” said the servant, “but won’t you step into the drawing-room? There’s no fire though, I am sorry to say,” he added, “but we’re all upset like now.”

“I don’t want a fire,” said Luce, “I shall stay here; only make haste and give my message.”

How still the house was, the newspapers lay untouched on the table and the vases were empty of their flowers. The old butler seemed strange too, as if he had forgotten his business.

Mrs. Carrol ill, Dick absent, the terriers

no longer running out to greet her, Dick's hats no longer hanging in the hall, or sounds of whistling and laughter reaching her ears—it was a terrible change. A sensation as of death clutched at her heart in a chill throb of terror—what could it mean, what had happened?

She sat down cold with dread, listening with all her might for some human sound to break the terrible silence. After a few moments the butler returned.

“Mrs. Vincent says, madam, that old Mrs. Carrol is unable to see any one, but that she will speak to you if you will please to walk up-stairs.” Luce bowed her head and followed the old man silently to Granny's study. There at Granny's own table, covered with memoranda and papers, sat Mrs. Vincent in stiffly bristling cap. She scarcely rose as Luce entered. All the chairs were empty now, and the books which used to litter them piled away in a corner. She held out a limp hand.

“This is an early visit,” she said, dryly; ‘did not you know Granny was ill?’”

“No, I came as soon as I heard——”

“Of the unfortunate circumstances—very

proper and kind of you I am sure. You were attached to the wretched young man."

"Do you mean Dick?" said Luce, warmly; "pray do not speak like that, before me."

"Ah!" Mrs. Vincent coldly and severely criticised the slight figure in the dark blue habit; and, looking at the firm pale face and large gleaming eyes before her, she said, after a pause, "You are infatuated still, I see. Well, few people expected it. I confess though that Dick Carrol never imposed upon *me*. As for his poor grandmother, the shock and the grief have killed her."

"Do you mean she is dying?" Luce started up.

"Not exactly, but she is very old, and no one can foresee the consequences. Fortunately I am here; I can take the post of duty, and reconcile her soul to God; she is very restless, and I fear ——"

"Let me go to her, poor, poor Granny!" Luce put both her hands together entreatingly.

"It is scarcely possible, I am afraid; she must not be agitated; the sight of a stranger would harm her."

“I, a stranger to Granny? You do not know how I love her.”

“I can make a pretty shrewd guess I fancy,” said Mrs. Vincent with a sneer. Luce thought of Granny lying there sad and alone, separated from her only by a door, and nursed by the unsympathetic touch of her daughter-in-law, and her heart yearned towards the old lady.

“I promise not to agitate her,” said Luce, quite humbly (Mrs. Vincent was having her revenge, and she thoroughly enjoyed it); “just let me give her a kiss.”

“A kiss! Do you think that will be of any benefit to her. Poor thing! Her days are numbered. I am just putting a little order into things; latterly she had grown very lax in business matters. I have found frightful extravagance in everything—waste in the servants’ hall ——”

Luce remembered the butler’s apology for the absence of fire in the drawing-room, and supposed that the omission was a part of the new rule of economy. “Where is your husband?” faltered Luce, who foresaw a dim vista of heartbreaking changes.

“ Vincent? Oh, he is gone into West Thorpe to meet Sir Hilary.”

“ Sir Hilary!”

“ Yes, about the warrant; he is anxious it should be served at once. Vincent very kindly suggested a little delay—in the family, you know, one does not want to be hard—still, it does not do to appear as if one ignored the disgrace that has fallen upon us through the behaviour of this poor misguided man.”

This time Luce did not say, “ Do not speak like that before me.”

Mrs. Vincent’s relentlessness, the sternness of miserable facts, crushed the speech out of her; she could only look a silent protest.

“ Vincent and I have a great deal to do. All these family disgraces have naturally grieved us extremely. I have sent for the children here, and we shall try to make ourselves valuable to poor Granny while she lives, and to restore the honour of the house as far as that is possible.”

“ Where is Dick?” said Luce, in a low voice.

“ What! Hasn’t he written to you? I

suppose he was ashamed; still, that was hard upon you, wasn't it? You were so fond of him."

Mrs. Vincent smiled unpleasantly, and fixed her cold grey eyes on Luce's face. The girl jumped up; her tender heart resented the hypocritical sorrow which veneered Mrs. Vincent's real feelings of triumph; her cheek flushed, and her voice shook with emotion. "I think you are very cruel," she said, "to gloat over any one's distress and misery, and to be so ready to believe the worst of your own relations; perhaps some day you may need kindness yourself."

"Young lady," said Mrs. Vincent, rising also, "if you only come to find fault with your elders, I think the sooner you go home the better—shall I ring for your horse?"

Luce promptly recognised the error she had fallen into in allowing her feelings to triumph over her judgment, and, altering her tone, she said:

"Mrs. Vincent, I beg your pardon; but feel for me a little—I am very unhappy, and I should so like to see dear Granny; please don't deny me this favour; it will not hurt her, I promise you."

Mrs. Vincent was about to reply in the negative, when a gentle tinkle broke the silence. "Granny's bell," said Mrs. Vincent, listening; "I wonder what she wants; wait a little, I will go and see."

"Tell her I am here," urged Luce, as Mrs. Vincent's cap-ribbons fluttered through the doorway.

Presently Mrs. Vincent returned. "You can go in," she said, shortly, "only just for a minute, though; it seems she heard your voice."

Luce needed no further permission, and glided quickly through the door, which Mrs. Vincent gingerly held half open. Granny's room was shrouded in darkness. Luce waited an instant on the threshold to accustom her eyes to the absence of light, then made her way slowly up to the shadowy four-post bedstead in the corner.

"Granny!"—"Luce!" The loving old arms were tightly clasped round her; the kind old voice murmured a whispered welcome. "My dear girl, I am so glad, so thankful, you are here."

"I came as soon as I could; we only arrived from London last night."

“I knew it, dear. I never doubted your heart.”

“You’re not ill, Granny?”

“No, child, not ill; just a little weak and dizzy, when I get up. You see, I’m old, as Mrs. Vincent says, I cannot expect anything else, at my age.”

“Ah, Mrs. Vincent—does she take care of you?”

“Excellent care. She doses me with tonics and soups; my body ought to get strong, but it is the spirit, Luce, that is sick, I’m afraid.”

“Poor Granny!” Luce clasped her protectingly.

“Aunt Vincent says I fret. I suppose it is wrong, but I can’t help it. Oh, Luce, my boy—my boy.”

“He is innocent!” said Luce, firmly. Granny broke into a sob.

“Yes, of course; if they would only believe it.”

“You musn’t be ill, Granny. You must get up: assert yourself; it would grieve *him*, you know.”

“Yes; do you think I could?” said the old lady, doubtfully.

“Certainly ; wouldn’t you like some light—what do you do all day in this dark room ?”

“Nothing. Mrs. Vincent says I must not read. I asked her for Homer. Well, perhaps she was right; the Greek letters might hurt my eyes; but Keats or Shakespeare—they couldn’t hurt me, I think, and it is worse to have only your thoughts for company. I think one must be very young to be happy in one’s own society long.”

Luce moved to the window, and threw back part of the shutter. The room faced the south, and a gleam of glorious sunlight burst into the darkened space. “It is quite a beautiful day,” said Luce, “and there are snowdrops on the terrace, and the golden yews look like burnished gold. I wish you could go out, Granny.”

“So do I, but never mind; tell me some more, Luce; have the gardeners mowed the lawn ?”

“Yes, Granny; it looks as smooth as velvet, and the lake is so still and clear, and I really think the waterfowl seem more lively than ever.”

“It is a fine place,” replied Granny, turn-

ing on her pillows, "and I have tried my best to keep it nice."

"It is nice, it's beautiful; and do you know I think everything misses you now you are ill. Do try and get up again soon."

"Do you think so?" Granny opened the calm blue eyes she had shut wearily. "Does any one miss me? I thought they were just waiting for my death; I am old, and cumber the ground; I ought to be cut down."

"Granny!" Luce hurried back, knelt down, and kissed the old lady's hand. "We cannot spare you; you *must* live—for Dick's sake; he has no friend but you."

"Ah, child, you are right; and to think that I had forgotten this." She smiled sweetly, then a spasm crossed the delicate face, lying white and fair among the big pillows. "Where is he—how is he? Mrs. Vincent will not allow me to speak of him. She says he has disgraced us."

"Live, dear Granny, live to be proud of him. I don't know where he is; but of this I am sure, he is neither a coward nor a liar; say you believe it—don't listen to Mrs. Vincent—she wants your money."

"Yes—hush!"—the old lady looked

anxiously round—"she might hear, she has such sharp ears; when I am tired and want to sleep she tries to persuade me to alter my will—but I can't, Luce; only sometimes I feel weary and wish it were all over. You have done me so much good, child; you will come again, won't you, soon?"

"Yes, yes, dear Granny, indeed I will."

"I think you must go now, or Mrs. Vincent will be suspicious. I wish she were not quite so mistrustful. It is a little trying, but she means well—she means very well." Granny sighed. "Kiss me, child, kiss me again," she added, fervently, "there is life in your lips."

"It is the love at the bottom of my heart, Granny, you feel its warmth—now don't despond."

"No—but perhaps you had better close the shutter—aunt Vincent ——"

"And shut out all the sunshine when you are so fond of it—no, no, aunt Vincent shall not keep you in the dark."

The very last things Luce saw as she left the room, were Granny's happy calm smile and the eyes that beamed with gratitude and affection upon her. Fired with new courage

she again proceeded to face Mrs. Vincent, whose table was piled higher than ever with bills and papers and cheque-books, into the latter of which she seemed to have made some considerable inroads.

“I don’t think Granny is so ill,” said Luce, quietly; “she wants light and sunshine and air, and to be cheered; it is very bad for her to lie like that in the dark.”

“Much light is injurious to the eyes of an old person,” sententiously observed Mrs. Vincent. “Granny has tried her eyes far too much already with those rubbishing books.”

“But it is so sad and so lonely for her.”

“At her age she should make her peace with God. She is not careful of her soul, she is very lax in her opinions, she reads philosophical works and books that are not orthodox ——”

“Granny is very good,” said Luce, standing firm and erect. “I don’t know what you call orthodox, but I know she is a Christian.”

“And can’t bear the Athanasian Creed, and likes to read about Buddhism as if it were the Bible. If she had brought up

Dick differently, carefully, without spoiling him, as with God's help I have brought up all my children, this distress would have been spared her. Quiet and silence are the best medicines for her now."

"They will kill her," said Luce, quickly.

"Tut, tut, child. You don't understand. Leave Granny to me; I shall do my duty."

"I am coming back again," said Luce, with a touch of defiant firmness. "Granny wishes it."

"We shall see—if her pulse is higher, or her face flushed, or she does not take her beef-tea as well as usual, you will not be admitted, I warn you."

Luce made no further observations. To dispute with Mrs. Vincent was like attempting to knock one's shins against a granite crag—the shins must suffer. She shook hands formally and descended the stairs. The old butler, looking more grey and shaky than ever, timidly inquired how she had fared.

"Did you see her, did you see the old lady?" he asked, with anxious quavering voice.

“Yes, I saw her,” Luce answered in her clear treble; “yes—I saw her.”

“Is she very ill—is she going to *die*?” he inquired in a whisper.

“No, she is better.”

“Thank God! Then they,” pointing with his finger upstairs, “will not be masters here just yet.”

“No, I think not. Be very attentive to Mrs. Carrol; she must want for nothing with old servants like you.”

“Bless you, we do what we can for her; why, we worship the very ground she treads on; she is a good lady, she is—if anything bad came to her, why the whole parish would turn out like one man and follow her funeral.”

“That’s right,” said Luce, hopefully; “you ought to appreciate her, for there are not many like her in the world.”

“You are coming again, Miss?” the old butler said, following her to the door.

“Oh, yes, very soon.” Then Luce, with the help of her groom, swung herself into the saddle, and trotted off.

It was late in the afternoon when she reached Highview; she was tired and hungry, for she had had no luncheon.

Mrs. Vincent, in her energetic notions of economy, never remembered the wants of others.

But she was calm and satisfied. She had done her duty, and she had brought a ray of moral sunshine into poor old Granny's life. Mr. Highview had entreated Lady Eleanor to make no comment on Luce's absence, and for once she obeyed his wishes and spared the girl. Maud was not so thoughtful; she plied Luce with questions, and pretended a vast deal of interest and anxiety. Luce answered the questions as well as she could, and tried to believe as much of the interest as she dared.

CHAPTER V.

“WHAT did I tell you?” exclaimed Julian Bruce, joyfully, one fine morning, dangling a letter in front of Dick’s sleepy eyes. Dick was in bed; sorrow promoted sleep in his case and he rose late, so that Julian usually completed two or three hours’ work before his friend’s waking.

“What is it, who is it from?” asked Dick, turning lazily on his elbow.

“Why, from her, from the woman I believed in,” said Julian, spreading out the letter which Luce had sent him. “Now what did I say? Are you not ashamed of despairing when even a girl trusts you implicitly?”

“All the worse for her,” muttered Dick, diving again beneath the bed-clothes.

“Come, nonsense, rouse yourself; this letter must be answered, and by you.”

“ I am not going to tie up an innocent woman’s life with my wretched existence.”

“ You do not mean to succumb utterly. Surely such a woman is too precious to be lost ? ”

“ The more precious, the easier things are to lose.”

“ Not a true woman’s heart. Dick, where is your ambition ? ”

“ Ambition ! I haven’t any. At least, not your kind of ambition. I can’t see the use of toiling and slaving as you do, frittering away youth, and denying yourself every atom of pleasure for the sake of finding out some stupid bit of history, or of giving lazy people a lecture. The world turns over and over again, and everything rights itself without any one’s help. Now my ambition is of a different kind. I want to live my own life, troubling no one, and bothered by nobody, and that’s just what seems impossible. It’s awfully hard.”

“ It is the rule of life, no man can live to himself.”

“ Oh, I know that is the doctrine of bigots and ascetics. I don’t believe in asceticism.”

“After all,” said Julian, seating himself, “the value of everything is relative. To you and men of your sort, for instance, the value of wine, of diamonds, of riches, is nothing in itself, but only because by them you are enabled to outshine your friends. Now the value of everything material is nil to me. I want fame because it is the best thing I know of. I don’t care if I am appreciated or valued now, because I know my work is good, and right, and necessary, and will live.”

“Your reward is in the future. Well, I don’t want any reward; I don’t wish to look forward, and I don’t care to look back, but I should like to enjoy the present, and enjoy my life as I understand it. Where is the harm of that?”

“No abstract harm, perhaps, but the thing is impossible. To return to this letter, if you do not answer it you will make a fond, honest, true heart unhappy.”

“Why does she care for me? I am wretched enough in all conscience—what does she want of me?”

“Dick, where is your chivalry?”

“Chivalry! We have outlived those times.

It is every man for himself now. A woman's reputation is fair game for any rascal who chooses to tear it in pieces. No ; you must appeal to something else, Julian, if you wish to make an impression."

"Do you mean you could deceive the woman who trusted in you?"

"I mean nothing ; Luce might have saved me had circumstances been different. The best thing she can do now is to forget my existence."

"Shall I write to her to this effect?" said Julian, in a cold and serious voice.

"Julian, bear with me a little. I am not accustomed yet to feeling that every one despises me."

"Why need you care what the world thinks? Only God and your own conscience signify."

"I am not like you. I *do* care what the world thinks."

"You can't even act up to the philosophy which tells you to live your life without caring for any one else. Oh Dick, you disappoint me."

"Why do you expect anything?"

"You are right ; it is foolish. - However, as

I do not intend to leave you to your own devices, I am going to answer this letter. Now get up quickly and help me."

In addition to the note from Luce, Julian received a letter from Mr. Highview, stating that he should call in the afternoon, and hold a consultation with the two young men. Julian had lately developed a taste for intrigue; he enjoyed taking the thread of events in his hand, arranging, deciding, pulling his friend out of the mire. Mr. Highview came at his request. Dick was to be saved, reinstated, helped against his own will.

Dick, physically strong, was morally weak. Julian, nervous, and febrile, of delicate frame and appearance, indomitably strong in mind. He wrote to Luce a kind and reassuring letter, and, when after breakfast Dick plunged into the reposeful languor of a cigar, Julian sat down to his work calmly and impassively, as though nothing more than a page of copy required his attention. At three o'clock Mr. Highview arrived. This excellent man, to whom honour was all important, looked flushed and flurried. He was full of personal sympathy for Dick, and

yet shrank, constitutionally, from familiar intercourse with a person of tarnished honour. Lady Eleanor's observations had borne fruit—he felt he could never give his niece to any one lying under the ban of suspicion. He greeted Bruce cordially; shook hands, a prey to mixed feelings, with Dick, who seemed silent and constrained, and talked volubly, and irrelevantly, of the weather.

“Such storms,” he said; “bridge washed away by the rain, had to take a circuitous route to get to the station, trees uprooted in the park, safer in the country though—chimney-pots very dangerous in London.”

“The storm is over, I fancy,” said Bruce, smoothing out his papers mechanically; “but with regard to ——”

“Lady Eleanor begged to be remembered to you,” hastily put in Mr. Highview; then as an after-thought, he added, looking towards Dick, pale and silent on the sofa, “and to you too.”

“Lady Eleanor is always kind, and I am sure would be especially kind about this dreadful event.”

Mr. Highview, remembering Lady

Eleanor's wrath, had his doubts, but he prudently kept them to himself, merely murmuring :

“ Dreadful event, indeed.”

“ It must be averted,” said Bruce, firmly. “ You must give your valuable opinion as to the course to be pursued.”

“ I scarcely know—it is so mysterious.” Mr. Highview glanced doubtfully in the direction of the sofa.

“ I do not see that. A pearl necklace, entrusted to Dick, has been stolen ; the stupidity or the malice of somebody suggested Dick as the thief ; he was careless, certainly, criminally careless ; we cannot acquit him of that ; but, Mr. Highview, let us be logical, is such a thing likely ? ”

“ Likely, no ; but if ——”

“ The necklace has been stolen or lost ; if lost it will probably be found ; if stolen we must endeavour to secure the thief.”

“ Yes, but ——”

“ He will be found, I have not much fear ; meanwhile, the first thing to be done, in my opinion, is for the warrant to be withdrawn, and for Dick to clear himself openly.”

“ I agree with you.”

“Now, Mr. Highview, lend us the aid of your wisdom and experience. The jeweller took out the warrant, I believe?”

“He did.”

“You must have some influence with him; what are his politics?”

“The firm have always been Conservative.”

“They will not care to disoblige you. You have great influence; your niece is engaged to be married to Mr. Carrol.”

“Not now, I believe—Lady Eleanor—”

“Pardon me, we will return to that later. There is no need to inform the world that you suspect your future nephew-in-law of fraud. You can bring pressure to bear, and suppress the warrant for the present. The great thing is to gain time; events may shape themselves as we wish. I have your approval?”

“I shall, of course, do what I can to elucidate the mystery, both for my own sake, because I am a magistrate, and also to clear your character, Dick,” said Mr. Highview, gravely.

Dick thanked him briefly.

Bruce resumed. “I think therefore that Dick should return with you to-night, that

you should declare him ready to give himself up when called upon ; you, in your own person, appeal to the jewellers to be careful lest they make some terrible mistake ; doubtless they are only actuated by the desire to obtain back their property, not by spite ; they will listen to you, and Dick must not any longer remain in hiding. Do you share my views ? ”

“ Entirely. You have explained the matter lucidly and carefully. No man of honour could disagree with you.”

“ Dick’s friends must show their entire trust in him on this occasion ; it is the best service we can any of us tender.”

“ Yes ; we are your friends, Dick.” Mr. Highview’s voice no longer trembled. “ And, please God, we shall see you righted.”

He had caught the infection of Julian’s calm trust and confidence ; he had forgotten Lady Eleanor’s warnings.

“ You will return to-night ? ” questioned Bruce.

“ Yes, to-night. Pack up your portmanteau, Dick.”

A flush of pleasure passed over Dick’s pale cheeks. He was not accustomed to

suspicion and contempt; they hurt him, he had no armour proof against their attacks—even Mr. Highview's previous coldness had made him wince. Now that he recognised heartiness and friendliness in Mr. Highview's words his serenity and unruffled *amour-propre* returned. He rose, and with a firm step moved into the next room to make his preparations. Julian rang for tea. The landlady answered the bell; the trio perplexed and interested her; there was some mystery about them, she felt sure, and she would have given worlds to unravel it. A mystery, young men, and a possible lover in Dick, if he would only condescend to look at her, a conclusion which she still hoped for, were sufficient to pique any woman's curiosity. Mr. Highview's face, too, was familiar to her. She did not know his name, for he had entered unannounced, and she ransacked her memory for a clue to the vague fancies his appearance evolved. As she bustled about with the tea-tray she listened eagerly in order to pick up some crumbs of the conversation, but in vain; Bruce was on his guard, and carefully kept

Mr. Highview to the discussion of the most ordinary topics.

“I have been thinking,” said Mr. Highview, on the landlady’s departure, “I don’t believe Lady Eleanor would like you to stay at Highview just now, you see, with Luce; it’s awkward, you understand; I am not unfriendly, but it’s awkward.”

“Couldn’t you go to Long Leam?” asked Bruce.

“Impossible! Granny is ill, and under the charge of my aunt and uncle. They are just now my greatest enemies.”

“But then ——”

“I have it,” said Mr. Highview. “You and Bruce must go to the hotel at West Thorpe; you will be on the spot, no one can say you are afraid; I shall be near and can communicate with you whenever I wish to—besides you must attend to your election.”

“My chance is over.”

“I am not so sure of that; the current of public opinion may set in the opposite direction; you will be looked upon as a martyr, pitied, sympathized with, and raised to greater honour.”

“That is not impossible,” said Bruce.

“Lady Eleanor wishes me to stand,” continued Mr. Highview, with a shamefaced air, “but I don’t care about it; the House of Commons is very mixed now, and besides I am not even sure that it is possible so late in the day; but you who have done all the hard work should persevere, reap your reward, go in and win.”

“Certainly! Try to be ambitious, Dick. Besides, you have no right to disappoint your friends,” said Julian, encouragingly.

“It seems my friends know better what is good for me than I do myself,” said Dick, ruefully.

“Of course, or we should not be your friends.”

Thus it was settled, and the three men left by the afternoon train for West Thorpe. Late as it was, Mr. Highview sought an interview with the firm of jewellers, and, judging from the composed and pleased expression of his countenance, with a satisfactory result.

CHAPTER VI.

JULIAN'S letter considerably eased Luce's anxiety, and her uncle's information tended to diminish it still more. Her lover was well. He was at West Thorpe, near her; matters were not so serious as she had supposed, and he knew that she loved him. She could afford now to wait calmly for the time when they would meet again. This time need not be far distant, for Bruce had promised to send Dick to her as soon as she made arrangements to that effect. It must, unfortunately, be a clandestine meeting, for Lady Eleanor threw herself into such paroxysms of anger whenever Luce mentioned Dick's name that the latter abandoned all attempt to obtain her consent to the interview. Luce neither doubted her own constancy nor that of Dick. It never occurred to her to sup-

pose that worldly circumstances made any difference to love, nor that the fact of her intended possessing fewer friends afforded a reasonable pretext for discarding his attentions. Luce considered her word sacred, she had pledged it to Dick, knowing thoroughly what she was about, and she had no intention of withdrawing it; there might be difficulties perhaps, there might be bitter moments to pass, but they could only be moments—and what are moments to love which counts on eternity? Insensibly she built her castles in the air, and wove her happy day-dreams, finding a keen and searching delight in the prospect of the pains she must endure for her lover's sake.

A day or two elapsed. Luce lived as in a trance, only semi-sentient, impervious to the pricks of ordinary things, passive before Maud's hints and sarcasms, patient under Lady Eleanor's fault-finding. There are times when the body relaxes its demands, and subsides into careless indifference; the supremacy of the soul asserts itself, and lives in an intensity of joy, which is essentially spiritual. Such a period had overtaken Luce; material sorrow was powerless to harm her, for she existed

only in the interior life. Voices sounded dim and far away to her ear; she trod lightly as on air, and listened serenely to the whispers of her heart. And now the hour had come. This very afternoon she was to meet Dick, and hear from his lips that he still needed her. Under the large beech-trees near the river, in a secluded part of the park, the meeting was arranged. Luce was the first to arrive; she judged every instant wasted out of the presence of her lover, but she was neither anxious nor worried because he was not already there; she liked to think of him, to dream and linger; it was happiness enough to walk under the vast spreading aisles of the beech-branches, to hear the murmur of the sleepy river, and to rest in the silence, sometimes quaintly broken by the hoarse cawing of the busy rooks. The day was still, and soft, and misty, a day impregnated with a spirit of sadness, yet suited to a mood of tender, trustful love. The water glistened in a broad silvery streak towards the middle of the stream, shading off into the palest grey, and violet at the edges; the delicate blue sky was sprinkled with layers of soft grey clouds,

of a uniform and harmonious tint. Against the horizon masses of dark foliage stood, shrouded in a mantle of transparent mist; all nature quivered and shimmered in soft and gentle undertones—sentiment rather than passion seemed the key-note of the situation. Luce walked up and down slowly, drinking in the quiet beauty of the scene. Presently a crackling of the dead leaves, daintily sparkling with moisture, made her turn quickly. In another instant she was clasped in Dick's arms.

“Luce, how good you are to give me this opportunity!”

“Good? What do you mean—are we not engaged?”

“Yes, but still ——”

Julian had warned him, as he valued his own happiness, not to forsake this true woman.

“I did not think—how could I tell? you know what a poor wretch I am.”

“I know that you are in trouble, and that I love you,” she said, clinging to him trustfully.

Luce's eyes were so pathetically expressive when she spoke thus from her heart

that it was impossible for the most fastidious to deem her plain.

“How can I accept such a sacrifice? I am not an utter brute, Luce.”

“Dear, how pale you look,” she said, unheeding his question; “you have suffered a great deal; why was I not by your side from the very first to comfort you? You know I wanted to comfort you.”

“Yes, I know,” he said, wearily, “you are too good to me, Luce; I do not deserve it.”

“I did not know that love counted the cost and valued itself; have I not told you I love you? Don’t you believe me, Dick?”

“I do believe you—yet I scarcely dare to believe you.”

“I, too, have been very unhappy,” confessed Luce; “let us sit down a little here on the trunk of this tree, it is quite dry and comfortable. We can talk better so.”

They seated themselves on the fallen stem, the venerable bark of which was here and there smooth and slippery, elsewhere rough and grey with clustering moss and lichen.

“Unhappy—you?”

“Yes, to think of what you were enduring. Ah, Dick, there are only two sorts of women—those who love and those who do not—and I ——”

“You are the fondest and truest little heart in the world. I appreciate you, Luce,” he said, putting his arm round her.

“Do you?” Her brilliant eyes sought his with looks of love. “Then I must read you a little sermon. Why do you say I am too good, and praise me and pay me compliments? It pains me, Dick. Do you think I need that? I have my reward when I feel that I can be something to you. As I said before, there are but two sorts of women. If I did not love you no persuasion of yours could induce me to do the least little thing for your sake; but, as I love you, such words as sacrifice, goodness, unselfishness, simply don’t exist. I am yours. You do not stand still or pause to pay yourself a compliment. Look upon me as yourself ——”

“But, Luce,” he said, very tenderly. Her words touched him strangely.

“Let me finish. I am *yourself*. I am

pleased with every joy, suffer with every pang, in fact my existence is yours. I can have only one real sorrow, and that is to be parted from you."

She stopped, and, as though overwhelmed by the importance of her self-revelation, bent her head timidly.

"Luce, I accept your sacrifice. As you wish it, nothing shall part us; but my dear little girl I fear you are laying up for yourself a great deal of trouble ——"

"No, no. Now tell me all." She settled herself quietly, her big eyes dilated, while she hung passionately on his lips as he told her of the difficulties with which he had to contend. Though the warrant was not served, and a lull seemed to have fallen upon the proceedings, yet every day brought defections from his side; friends cold and estranged, side-glances, actual avoidance. Then Luce, nestling closer to his side, recounted her visit to Granny, dwelt upon the old-lady's trust and confidence in her grandson, warmed with indignation as she spoke of aunt Vincent's heartless behaviour, and commented on the changes at Long Leam; the parsimony and the grasping meanness of

the woman who had usurped the place of his grandmother.

Dick listened, and his face grew stern and grave. He withdrew the arm that was round Luce. "They will make her change her will, I am sure," he said, gloomily, "and then I am done for. I have only a couple of hundred a-year of my own. In that case, Luce, we cannot marry, for I shall not accept a fortune from my wife; no, I have not sunk quite as low as that yet."

Luce's lip trembled. "I have no fortune," she said, "none whatever. Did you think I had?"

"I did not know," he answered, lightly; "I thought it very likely, your uncle being childless ——"

"But he has nephews. Tell me"—she hesitated—"that was not the reason you asked me to marry you?"

Luce winced with shame as she asked this question of her lover; she dared not even look at him.

"The reason—no. I really never thought of it."

Thank God, then, she could look up; thank God she need not feel ashamed.

Maud's insinuations were false ! “ Oh, I am so glad,” she said, “ so very glad.”

“ Glad that we shall be penniless ? ”

“ No, no, of course ; but I think now that you must care for me a little ; for myself, I mean, as I have no money.”

“ I care for you very much.” He kissed her as he said this, but the kiss was formal ; there was little warmth in it. Luce could not help thinking that, in his place—here under the beech-trees, where the clear light filtered down and touched the herbs and grasses at their feet, alone with the girl who loved him dearly, so close to her that he must almost hear her heart beat, her little hand in his, his lips touching her soft cheek,—she would not have kissed so, and yet in another instant she chid herself for unworthy doubts. He was taking her without a fortune, purely on her own merits. Luce thought there was something very noble in the manner in which he had received the news of her dowerless condition, and in the indifference he had displayed, yet this was the man vulgar people misunderstood, and accused of theft and fraud. They were fools ; no one knew his real

character like herself. She again turned upon him the fire of her lustrous eyes, soft with pride and happiness. "Do not be dejected, dear," she said, a touch of motherly kindness in her voice; "these troubles will pass away, and I am going to help you to bear them. You will be glad to have my help, won't you?"

"Yes, indeed."

"You don't know how strong I am really," she said, leaning back against her lover's shoulders, a happy smile playing round her lips; "strong in health, strong in spirit, I feel as if nothing mattered now I have you"—she had been going to say "your love," but she checked herself—she had no right to think he loved her yet. "Together we can brave the world, your aunt, and uncle; as your wife I shall have the right to fight your battles, to put my love like a shield between you and the attacks of wicked people; you will not mind much then, dear?"

The sweetness of her voice, mellowed by the glow of her strong feeling, completely captivated him, it lulled his senses into a delicious languor, her innocent flattery

soothed his ruffled pride, her perfect trust restored his confidence, she was a woman in a thousand, eminently fitted for him he thought. And Luce talked on, a harmonious lilt in her voice, as she painted their future in glowing colours, touching delicately on his present troubles, and dilating on the talents and capacities he was going to unfold. The confidence of a loving woman inspires the very belief she implies. Dick felt himself stronger and better; he ignored the flattery (unconscious, indeed, the mere gilding of love) and acknowledged the truth of her judgment. And yet he was no more in love with her than he had been on the first day; like a king, he permitted himself to be adored; his senses were cold, for they were charged with gratitude rather than affection, but her assurances steeped him in a delicious kind of lazy well-being. The lotus is a pleasant fruit, easy to assimilate; Luce, poor simple soul, mistook his friendliness, his responsive return of sympathy, for the frail commencement of love, and rejoiced.

“Do not give up the election,” she urged, “do not—let none think you attach much

importance to this accusation; you have nothing to reproach yourself with, but go on your way quietly as if nothing had occurred."

"Just what Bruce says, yet how can I?"

They had risen, and were passing slowly by the river side, faint wreaths of mist floated around them, some water-fowl called to each other harshly from the sedges, the daylight gradually declined into a duller tone of grey, there would be no sunset to-night. "You can, dear Dick, you of all men. I think Lady Eleanor may be brought round to give you her countenance, and if so, if we can be married ——"

"It is no use thinking of that at present, let me get out of this vile business first," he said, impatiently. At that instant he would gladly have given up Luce's love just to be free, happy, and popular again as he had seemed only a few months ago. He was caught in a kind of noose; if he could but have once extricated himself he should be more wary for the future.

"And you do not think our marriage would be advisable, would be of advantage?" said Luce, regretfully.

"No, no, it is quite impossible; don't you

see—but the election is different, I shall probably go on with that, it must be decided next week.

“ Oh, if you can only succeed ! ” she said, with a gasp of intense longing.

“ You will be pleased ? ”

“ Of course. And Granny—Dick, think how pleased she will be, poor old dear. I am going to see her to-morrow, what shall I say to her ? ”

“ Tell her I’m awfully sorry to give her all this pain—tell her I mean to lead a more useful life, she shall be proud of me some day.”

“ Dear Dick ! ”

“ Only she must have patience ; just now I feel knocked down.”

“ Oh, she will have patience—she has been patient all her life, she has believed in you and waited so long.”

“ I can’t think why you women have such trust in a fellow.”

“ Can’t you ? ”

“ No, by Jove, for the life of me I can’t see why you go on caring when one always disappoints you.”

“ Shall I tell you—because we love the

fellow!" Luce gave a bright little laugh that rippled away and was lost in the murmur of the river.

"It is a good thing women *can* love. I believe you like us to give you trouble."

"Well, we must have something to do, you know," and she laughed again.

"When shall I see you?" She was serious immediately.

"I don't know—it is very difficult—to-day Lady Eleanor has gone over to luncheon at the Grimsby's, and I knew she was safely absent for an hour or two; but she does not often go away for luncheon, and then I cannot be sure of my movements—but we can write, and, even if I may not talk to you, at least I know now that I have seen you that all is well—and I shall trust you ——"

"Yes, you can trust me—but it is no credit to me, I haven't even an excuse for forgetting you, Luce, you have been so kind ——"

"Hush!" She put her hand over his mouth. "It is unsatisfactory parting so—but we must not be too exacting, Dick."

He understood. He took her in his arms again and kissed her. It gave her a sensation of delicious tremour when he took her

like that in his arms, she felt afraid and yet almost acutely happy. The warmth of his strong young life seemed to penetrate her veins, to treble her pulsations, to make her brave, and hardy, and unflinching. Her starved heart expanded and filled her bosom almost painfully. In his arms she would have died without a murmur.

“You good dear girl,” he said, taking both hands, “I cannot thank you, but I will think of you ——”

“Yes think of me,” she said, passionately. She stood alone by the riverside for some moments after he left her, she watched his quick manly stride across the heavy grass, she saw him let himself out of the gate into the carriage-drive, she beheld him in imagination passing along by the sturdy spreading rhododendron bushes, away through the lodge gates to the little public-house where he had left his horse. Her thoughts followed him he as reached home, (such a home! a hired chamber in a noisy inn), where possibly Bruce already awaited him, their simple meal, the friendly chat and smoke, the business, the correspondence, all the thousand and one items which make up a

man's life, and keep him from that deadly dreaming which is the poison of unoccupied women, passed before her mind. After all, he was happier than she; she was alone, helpless, without any definite business, except that weary business of waiting. She smothered a sigh. The afternoon had been too happy, she would not desecrate it by a single murmur. Her imagination had pictured rightly, had seen as in truth, Dick riding home quickly with lightened heart and hopeful anticipations, but what she had not pictured was an empty room, Bruce absent, and a letter lying in all its blank whiteness on the oil-cloth-covered table. Dick's hand trembled as he took it, he recognised the writing, and he rather guessed than read the words it contained.

“Come to me at once without delay. To-morrow, in the fir plantation, at twelve.

“EVELYN.”

A rendezvous, and under such circumstances. It could mean only some fearful complication, some tragic ending. Go to Evelyn, meet her while her husband still treated him as a vulgar thief, and was eager to put in practice the arm of the law to

serve his own personal vengeance. Could it be a trap? No! He would not insult her with the thought. But it was dangerous, horribly dangerous, as he was then situated. Yet he never thought of refusing. A woman in distress, a woman he had loved, Heavens! did he love her still? If so, what would become of Luce?

CHAPTER VII.

WE left Lady Fenchurch on the evening of the day she had driven in to West Thorpe, when, returning, she had been forced to endure a scene of violent jealousy and reproaches from her husband. Her pride was up in arms, she felt no inclination to sue for pardon for a fault she had never committed, she braved his anger with defiant flippancy, and talked recklessly to her sister-in-law at dinner. Sir Hilary scarcely spoke, and Miss Fenchurch, who always took the cue from her brother, answered Evelyn's questions and remarks in a state of mortal terror. That Evelyn should be so foolish, so daring, so ungrateful, passed her understanding; a love affair with a young man was bad and wicked enough in all conscience, but when the husband was Sir Hilary, the most per-

fect and admirable of brothers, it became a heinous crime. Miss Fenchurch, in her shrivelled virginity, deprived of the stimulus of love and passion, comprehended only a cold and temperate friendship, the mere notion of anything warmer set her thinking in frightened curiosity. What then had occurred between Evelyn and Mr. Carrol? Was it possible that she had accorded the young man so much as a thought stolen from her debt to her husband, and, if so, how and why were questions that sorely puzzled the old maid. After dinner she preserved a profound silence, for her conversation in the dining-room, broken only by deep sighs, had been kept up solely with a view to the edification of the servants. They were however already cognizant of everything, the groom having related the meeting with Dick to the footman, who repeated it to the housemaid, who informed the lady's-maid, who capped this intelligence by the news that Lady Fenchurch had cried pocket-handkerchiefs full of tears, and complained of a dreadful headache after lying on her bed, and drinking a cup of tea brought to her by Miss Fenchurch herself, a pro-

ceeding utterly at variance with the rules of the house, for which reason the lady's-maid concluded that Lady Fenchurch must be in disgrace with her husband with reference to the said young man, Mr. Dick Carrol. The servants, being thus duly informed of everything of interest, Miss Fenchurch need not have laboured so diligently to keep up appearances and to give an air of artless freedom to the extremely constrained relations of the trio. But how seldom do we know what is or is not hidden from our servants, and how much better is it for us to be kept in peaceful ignorance of our own sinful transparency !

Silence reigned in the big drawing-room. Sir Hilary read *The Times* as diligently as though he had never seen a newspaper for a month, his spectacles firmly fixed on his nose, the lamp conveniently at his elbow. Opposite, on the other side of the fire-place, Miss Fenchurch knitted indefatigably, and between them, Evelyn, buried in a large arm-chair, alternately yawned and read a novel. Presently the silence irritated her nerves past endurance—enforced stillness in company usually has that effect. She jumped

up and went to the piano. There she began to play everything she could think of in her jarring mood, airs from *Patience*, the last valse, fashionable dance music, rattling off one thing after another, reckless defiance expressed in her very finger-tips. Half-an hour elapsed, when Sir Hilary folded his paper, and somewhat testily cried out——

“For goodness’ sake cease that devil’s tattoo on the piano!”

“I thought you liked music,” said Evelyn suavely, ceasing to play; she had worn off some of her vexation, and now felt inclined for amiability.

“So I do, decent sober music—you don’t call that music, I suppose?”

“Certainly! dance music is most inspiring,” answered Evelyn, rising, however, and approaching the fire-place. “How cold my hands are; this room is a perfect ice-house.”

“It is warm enough here.”

“Yes—in the fireplace—but it is hateful sitting stewing over the coals.”

“I am sorry my house does not please you,” said Sir Hilary, coldly, resuming his arm-chair.

“Now, Hilary, don’t let us quarrel.” Evelyn smiled sweetly and spoke in the cajoling accents that usually conquered her husband. “What is it? Why are you angry? I told you the truth—there is no more to be said.”

Sir Hilary did not answer, he glared straight before him into the fire. Miss Fenchurch cleared her throat.

“I really think, Hilary, it was only a mistake—I mean ” (Miss Fenchurch felt that it was impossible to accuse her brother of making a mistake) “Evelyn is very sorry—you are very sorry, aren’t you, Evelyn? Tell him so. You *will* forgive her, Hilary?”

“Excuse me, Miss Fenchurch”—Evelyn’s voice was clear and icy. “There is nothing to forgive. Sir Hilary knows it.”

“At least you have been foolish and insincere,” he said at last.

“That was *before* my marriage; since, I have been a good wife.”

“She has been a good wife, Hilary,” echoed his sister, in her tinkling metallic tones.

“Let us be friends, Hilary, do!” Evelyn

knelt down beside her husband's chair, and took his limp hand in hers.

"Yes, do, Hilary!" again chimed in Miss Fenchurch.

"These rumours, these revelations in families, are very unpleasant. I wish my wife to be above reproach."

"Yes, of course, above reproach!" said the old maid, nodding her head.

"And I find you have deceived me—have had a love affair I knew nothing about."

"It wasn't much of a love affair," said Evelyn, airily; "besides, he is going to be married now."

"Well,"—the ice was breaking, evidently Sir Hilary meant to relent. "I will not be too hard on you, as you are young; you must promise to hold no further intercourse with Mr. Carrol,—my adversary, politically, remember, therefore additionally to be avoided, and I will perhaps make no more allusion to the extremely unpleasant events of the past."

"How kind, how forgiving you are!" said Miss Fenchurch, adoringly. "I told you, Evelyn, that my brother was a grand character. Ah! you should not make him

angry ; it will never occur again, my dear, I hope."

"Hilary," said Evelyn, who now stood quietly resting her arm on the mantelshelf, "you may be quite sure I shall not betray your confidence, but I cannot bear to be treated like a schoolgirl ; you were very unjust and cruel in your suspicions to-day ;" a sob choked her utterance ; though defiant she was not hardened, and adversity or disgrace, coupled with absence from her husband's roof, was the very last thing in the world she desired.

"There, dear, there," said Sir Hilary, soothingly, "we will talk no more of it."

"But I do not like to be suspected and accused," Evelyn said between her sobs.

"My dear, what are you crying for ?" asked Miss Fenchurch. "When my brother says he will not mention the matter again, I think you are very fortunate."

Evelyn began to dry her eyes. The tears she had shed were rather nervous than sorrowful ; she hated jarrings and scoldings and things contrary to the amenities of life. In her renunciation of Dick she had been greatly influenced by the desire of a quiet

life and the nervous shrinking from scenes. And now, here, after her show of good principle and wifely conduct, she was enduring the very disagreeable things in anticipation of which she had strangled her love at its birth.

Sir Hilary disliked to see women cry. He rose, fidgeted about, wiped his spectacles, took out his pocket-handkerchief and blew his nose ; then, as Evelyn grew calmer, he walked up to her and kissed her on the forehead.

“Come and play a game of dummy whist,” he said, “my dear, you will sleep the better for it afterwards.”

Miss Fenchurch bustled up and got out the cards and arranged the counters. By tacit consent no more was said on the subject ; and, when the demure butler brought in the tray of wine and water and the bed-candles, a scene of more unimpeachable domestic propriety could scarcely have met his eyes. Sir Hilary had taken dummy, and, thanks to Miss Fenchurch’s forgetfulness, by which he claimed two revokes, and Evelyn’s preoccupation, the few shillings he had won might be heard to fall with a

jingle into his trousers pocket, while he chuckled audibly.

“ You must really be more careful, Rachel,” he said graciously. “ At your age you ought not to revoke like a raw miss in her teens.”

Allusions to age did not please the old maid, but, thankful that her brother's equanimity was now happily restored, she forbore to show her vexation in any acrimonious repartee.

Evelyn dismissed all further thought of Dick from her mind; the subject now had become really far too unpleasant, and she sincerely hoped the slight conjugal squall had blown over without ill effects, but it had given her somewhat of a fright, and she determined to act prudently and circumspectly for the future.

Friday morning arrived, and the pearl necklace, which Messrs. Cherry and Appleton had promised her faithfully, had not yet reached her. She grew anxious, for she was particularly desirous to please Sir Hilary, and she knew that he liked her to display this, his last new and handsome gift, whenever an opportunity afforded itself. On this

occasion they were to dine with Mr. and Mrs. Grimsby, a rich brewer, who, having partially retired from business, endeavoured to spend some of his large fortune in ostentatious hospitality.

Mrs. Grimsby had fine diamonds, with which she took care to cover herself; and it would be doubly disappointing were she totally to eclipse Evelyn. The post had come in and there was no sign of the pearls. Evelyn debated in her own mind the wisest course to pursue, finally deciding to drive in herself to West Thorpe and fetch the necklace. The jewellers were generally so punctual, so business-like, they had promised so faithfully, that the affair was doubly incomprehensible. As she was starting Sir Hilary came out of his study.

“Where are you going, Evelyn?”

“I am going to West Thorpe,” she said, dropping the words out as she passed, too fidgety to arrest her steps for discussion.

“What, before luncheon--is not that rather unusual for you?”

“I had a headache, and I must buy some ribbon to wear in my hair to-night.”

“You will put on your pearls,” said Sir

Hilary, signing to the servant to bring him his coat.

“Of course! are you coming then?” she added nervously, buttoning her gloves.

“Yes, I have some business with Dewsnap, and, as you are driving in, I may as well go with you.”

Evelyn dared make no objection, and vaguely hoped she might call for her necklace without attracting any notice, while Sir Hilary paid his visit to the lawyer. She sprang lightly into the pony carriage, and took the reins while Sir Hilary settled himself beside her. His ruddy face bore an unusually happy expression; he took out a cigar and began to smoke in silent beatitude. It pleased him to be driving beside his pretty young wife, so that every one should see on what excellent terms they both were.

“You haven’t taken me out in your pony-carriage for a long time,” he remarked presently; “I think it runs very easy, but those ponies are not pulling well together; doesn’t Box bore a good deal?” Evelyn confessed that he did make her wrist ache, and Sir Hilary, telling her to stop, got out, and himself readjusted the ponies’ bits. He stood

for a moment in front of the pole, cigar in mouth, contemplating the elegant equipage, the ponies, and their graceful mistress, and a smile of satisfaction beamed on his countenance.

“Quite a first-class turn-out,” he said as he seated himself again beside her; “they don’t pull now, do they?” he asked; “they ought to have mouths like satin.”

“It is quite right since you altered the bits,” said Evelyn.

“Very well then.” He turned to the spruce little groom. “Now, Tom, do you hear, always bit her ladyship’s ponies like that, never let me see them again as they were just now, yawing about like brutes in a van.”

Sir Hilary was too well satisfied with himself and his belongings to notice his wife’s constrained silence, which she spasmodically broke by interjectional phrases of the smallest import, nor did he remark that her pallor increased as they neared the town.

“Where shall I drive you?” inquired Evelyn, when the first straggling houses became visible.

“You can set me down anywhere,” he said; “what have you got to do?”

“I shall take you at once to Dewsnap’s, then,” she said, ignoring his question, but Sir Hilary insisted on a *détour* by the linen-draper’s, whither Evelyn had unwittingly declared she was going. The shop was in the market-place, and this gave an opportunity to the vain old man of being seen driving through the busiest streets with his beautiful wife. The ambition was innocent enough, but Evelyn’s guilty conscience pricked her with weary wonderings as to the meaning of this wish. At last when she had passed the jewellers, where she dared not stop, and had deposited her husband at Mr. Dewsnap’s, and watched him safely inside the door, she took courage and drove back rapidly to the jewellers’ shop; the little groom ran in at her request and summoned one of the partners, who came out looking fatter and more oily than ever, not forgetting to wash his hands with imaginary soap as he stood bowing and smiling by the side of the carriage.

“My necklace, Mr. Cherry,” said Evelyn, bending towards him, and speaking in a low

voice. "I have called for my necklace; why didn't you send it as you promised?"

"But we did send it, my lady, yesterday, by the young gentleman himself."

"The young gentleman! what young man?" questioned Evelyn, feverishly; scarcely daring to believe the possibility that flashed upon her mind.

"The young man—I fancy he was instructed to call for it."

"I never instructed any one; what do you mean? Are you mad?"

"Excuse me, my lady, we thought it was to save time, and we were glad to give the necklace to your messenger."

"It is stolen! I tell you it is stolen! What gross carelessness on your part! What am I to say to Sir Hilary? Don't stand staring there as if you were an idiot!" she added, sharply.

"My lady, it is the very first time such a thing has occurred, and I will at once inquire into the matter."

"Can you restore me the necklace? Where is it? Do you trust valuable jewellery to the first beggar in the street?"

"He was not a beggar, my lady, he was

a real gentleman, a friend of yours, I believe, Mr. Dick Carrol. If your ladyship will wait, I will ask my foreman for further particulars as to what he said."

"I don't want particulars—I want my necklace."

"I will do all that is in my power, my lady, we will send at once to Mr. Carrol's, and we will communicate with the police, and I have little doubt the thief will be traced."

"I cannot stay now," said Evelyn, feverishly, "Sir Hilary is waiting; you must write and apologise to him yourself for your rashness; he will be very angry, and he is certain never to employ you again."

Evelyn drove off, her brow compressed in anger, her face deadly white, and left the poor old gentleman standing there half-scared, still bowing respectfully on the curbstone. The ponies dashed down the narrow street; Evelyn, driving recklessly, nearly upsetting a tinker's cart drawn by a poor little donkey; the ponies snorted (the patient ass is ever an object of aversion to the highly-bred and prosperous steed), shied, and nearly bolted against a dead wall. Evelyn, recalled

to a sense of her position, grasped the reins more firmly and reduced the ponies to a sober trot. But her thoughts were dancing wildly; what should she say—Dick Carrol, Dick a thief, what did it mean?—how avert her husband's displeasure, how account for the mystery she had preserved about the necklace? He would be very angry, perhaps think she was in league with Dick; and he would believe the old story which she had already found such difficulty in disposing of. Anxious and miserable she awaited her husband. Sir Hilary emerged presently from the lawyer's house looking extremely cheerful; he had drunk a glass of famous old sherry, and received good news of the election prospects. Mr. Dewsnap came out with him, and the two men, talking, walked slowly down the narrow-paved approach to the gate.

“Here, Dewsnap, are not her ladyship's ponies looking well? I know you are a judge of horses.”

“So, so,” said the lawyer, flattered in his only weakness—even lawyers are human, “but I can very well see that these are a beautiful pair.”

“ Beautiful, yes ; and I can tell you my lady knows how to drive them,” said Sir Hilary, swinging himself up beside her.

“ Your ladyship is quite well ? ” said Mr. Dewsnap, urbanely, struck by her strange pallor.

“ Quite well, thank you.”

Evelyn immediately flushed a brilliant pink, which confirmed the wary old lawyer in the idea that there was something amiss.

“ Well, good-bye, Dewsnap,” shouted Sir Hilary, as they drove off ; “ come and dine soon, I’ve a new bin of claret I want you to taste.”

CHAPTER VIII.

ON the drive home they talked of indifferent subjects. Evelyn determined to leave everything to chance; the necklace might be found, or at any rate the jewellers must bear the blame of their carelessness. Having decided this she bent all her energies to be as charming as possible to her husband, who returned home in a most agreeable humour. Evelyn took care to delay her dressing so that the carriage was at the door before she was ready to start, and she had but time to clasp round her neck a small diamond *rivière*, and wrapped in her cloak to hurry down stairs. Sir Hilary therefore had no opportunity of seeing what had occurred until she threw off her cloak in Mrs. Grimsby's front hall, when he merely exclaimed, "Why, you have not got on your pearls after all!"

“ I was in such a hurry,” she replied, following the stately footman into the drawing-room

During dinner Evelyn, the lady of highest rank, and consequently placed next her host, felt her husband’s eyes fixed doubtfully upon her ; but the laws of fashionable society have this advantage, that they separate husband and wife, and effectually preclude all opportunity of conjugal jars and cross-questionings. On the other side of her was seated a rich young stock-broker, who, his time having hitherto been occupied in money-making, remained a novice in the society of pretty women. He thought Evelyn quite the most beautiful creature he had ever beheld, and allowed his eyes to roam gleefully from the top of her well-bred head with its coils of raven black hair to the little pink ear, the pillared throat, and the full, graceful figure, until it reached the white and jewelled hands, and was lost in the mazes of her intricate yellow drapery. He envied the possessor of so much beauty, and thought that when he chose a wife he should treat himself to just such an one, a fine animal, well-bred, well-mannered, and worth the

money. He was rich enough in all conscience, and he had no idea of putting up with an inferior article. Evelyn, unconscious of the mental appraisement she was undergoing, and pleased to distract her mind at any cost, laughed heartily at his puerile and somewhat vulgar jokes, and playfully answered his attempts at gallantry.

“Fine house, this, isn’t it?” he said, “my friend Grimsby’s; I’ve known him a long time, you know—all the best houses in the City are acquainted—doesn’t do things by halves—first-rate wine—a French *chef*—and, by Jingo, such pictures—you see there’s a Millais, and a Turner, and a what’s the fellow’s name?—a ——”

“Sir Joshua Reynolds,” suggested Evelyn.

“Yes, yes; he don’t go in for those washed-out dug-up dead people—the ascetic school, you know; likes flesh and blood; quite my opinion—I like flesh and blood; fond of pictures, Lady Fenchurch?”

“Yes, very fond,” said Evelyn.

“Paint a little, perhaps? Most young ladies paint—their faces, too, I mean—ha, ha!” Evelyn looked grave.

“In your case that don’t apply; couldn’t

paint the rose or the lily, eh? Ever had your portrait taken, by some big chap I mean?"

"Never," answered Evelyn.

"Dear me; well now I should have thought—what is your husband's name; he's that red-faced, white-whiskered man, isn't he?"

"Sir Hilary," said Evelyn, smothering her laughter.

"Sir Hilary—yes, what a queer name; reminds one of an old rhyme, 'Dickery, dickery dock, the mouse ran up the clock.' Well, Sir Hilary ought to have you painted by Leighton, now, or Watts; tell him so from me, will you?"

"I'll tell him, certainly; but you know those great painters ask enormous prices."

"And quite right, too; always ask the price your goods can command; what is the use of being rich if you don't get the best of everything—first-class prices and a first-rate article—it's cheap in the long run."

"Yes," vaguely assented Evelyn; she did not quite know what to say. The mercantile view of life had not yet occurred to her. There was a good deal in its favour cer-

tainly, and now she thought of it, had she not been actuated by its influence in the transaction of her own marriage? Her reflections were interrupted by Mr. Grimsby's jolly voice.

"I'm going to work like a nigger for your husband," he said, "on polling-day; I've no idea of these confounded Radicals getting into Parliament, and turning everything upside down. What do they mean by unearned increment and all that jargon. When a man has got money, never mind whether he has earned it or not, naturally he wishes to stick to it. Besides, it's all such stuff that talk about land; land is taxed heavily enough as it is, and if you meddle with land what is to prevent you meddling with capital? and in that case England may whistle for her prosperity; capital will make wings for itself—Try this Pommeray, it's superb."

"Do you think Sir Hilary will get in for the county?" asked Evelyn, who scarcely felt herself equal to a political argument.

"Can't say, I'm sure. You never can tell what makes people vote; but I should think so; he is very popular, and rides to hounds—the farmers like him."

“I think they do.”

“Then that other young fellow, his adversary, has no stake in the county, has not been here much; what has he ever done? He isn't a landlord; he is mixed up with a lot of racing fellows, the scum of the earth.”

“Do you mean Mr. Carrol?”

“Yes, of course, Dick Carrol; he is just Lady Eleanor's nominee; she is an infernally proud woman, only comes to see my wife under protest; I'm sure my wife is handsome enough for anything.” He looked towards Mrs. Grimsby at the bottom of the table, who, stately and resplendent in red satin, glittered with diamonds like a Roman Catholic image.

“Mrs. Grimsby is very handsome.”

“Handsome—I should think so. Why, when I married her she was so beautiful I did not dare let her walk out alone; they mobbed her—I assure you people positively mobbed her. She is worthy of diamonds, she is now; shows them off to perfection.”

At that instant the signal was given for the ladies to rise, and Evelyn marched out of the room obedient to her hostess's wave of the hand. In the drawing-room, which was

crammed with beautiful things arranged with the want of art and comfort that so plainly demonstrates the absence of real refinement, Mrs. Grimsby made a great fuss over Evelyn. She was the latest bride, a My-Lady, and the wife of the future member. Mrs. Grimsby felt herself justified in showing her preference. The other ladies, in very high gowns and skimpy draperies, timid country girls, or commonplace wives of business men, whom they had taken from humble families in days when a large fortune was an impossible prospect, and who seemed to serve the purpose of the guests on the stage, flocked together helplessly, and looked over photographs, books, or in undertones conversed about their respective household affairs. Mrs. Grimsby signed to Evelyn to take a seat on the large crimson satin sofa, of which her own gown seemed the gigantic remnant. "You were not cold at dinner? I hope Mr. Grimsby took care of you; you are looking a little pale, dear Lady Fenchurch."

"Thank you, I am quite well."

"Of course, one must make allowances, *young* married women, you know; you don't hunt now, I suppose."

“Indeed I do; I’m extremely fond of it.”

“Well, now you are just like me: I used to be quite mad about it. I had an elegant figure, you know, and very fine horses to ride; but Mr. Grimsby got frightened, and persuaded me to give it up.”

Evelyn looked at Mrs. Grimsby’s ample proportions, and thought that, if she had hunted lately, Mr. Grimsby was right in his consideration for the welfare of the horses.

“It does not do for ladies to get falls, you know; it jars one, and then so much outdoor exercise spoils the complexion.”

“Oh, if one thinks of one’s complexion ——”

“Lor, my dear, when you are a little older you will find it necessary; Mr. Grimsby never forgets to bring me the cold cream regularly before he gets into bed.”

“Indeed!”

“I suppose you are quite in a tremor about this election. I wish Mr. Grimsby would have stood. I think M.P. to your name looks elegant, though of course it does not affect a lady, but he won’t; he says it is throwing away good money for a bad cause. I don’t understand politics. Do you?”

“Not very well.”

“Well, there is no need—let the men manage that for us; it is their business; only of course one must be a little *au fait* of things.”

Mrs. Grimsby was very proud of her French, of which she had acquired a tolerable smattering at a French boarding-school. She pronounced it with a true cockney accent, but then, as she said, it gave you so much *éclat* to know French.

“Do you love orchids? I do. Here, I will show you a present Mr. Grimsby made me on my birthday—it cost 100*l.*; isn’t it a dear ugly darling? I like ’em because they are so quaint.” The two ladies rose to examine a peculiarly ugly brown and yellow flower, placed in a china pot near; the flower looked as though it had tried to be a butterfly of some kind and had failed egregiously. “It is very rare,” said Mrs. Grimsby.

“Very rare indeed, I should think,” said Evelyn. Then they returned to the red satin sofa, and Mrs. Grimsby dilated on her establishment.

“Now tell me, Lady Fenchurch, do you prefer powder or not? I say powder; it

shows off plush breeches and silk stockings so much better. I may say, I think I am fortunate in my footman; one came from the Marquis of Thistledown, and the other from the Duke of Silkstone. You know the duke has such gardens, and sells all his fruit they say—rather mean, I think—but they are fine fellows, aren't they? ”

“ Very fine,” assented Evelyn, as soon as the footman in question, accompanied by the groom of the chamber, had departed with the coffee-tray.

“ But they are a lazy lot, you wouldn't believe how lazy. I found out the other day that whenever I go to town for a night, the footman lies in bed and has his breakfast brought up to him by the scullery-maid—but what can one do, one must have fine fellows? I understand the Earl of Courtly always takes his footmen without a character, provided they are goodlooking and stand six feet one in their stockings.”

Further disclosures were rendered impossible by the entrance of the gentlemen. Mrs. Grimsby removed herself to the other side of the red satin sofa, and the young stock-

broker immediately made his way to the vacant place beside Evelyn.

“Have we been a long time?” he said, tenderly; “I am afraid we have, men all smoke now after dinner, and that keeps them as long as drinking wine used to in the old days. It is a shame I think to stay away from the ladies when it isn’t necessary.”

“Oh, we don’t mind, I assure you,” said Evelyn.

“Well, I don’t call that civil, Lady Fenchurch—you are not like some of the girls I know, I hope, who pretend they do not care a bit about gentlemen’s society. It is such a nonsensical fad and can’t be true.”

“I like men’s society very well.”

“Of course you do. You are a woman of taste, I am sure.” At that instant Lady Fenchurch noticed a cold glitter in Sir Hilary’s blue eye (no eye can express such steely impenetrability as an orb of that colour); he stood a little way off, playing with his watch-chain and talking to Mrs. Grimsby. They seemed to be speaking of her, but probably that was only her own fancy. She scarcely heard the pretty speeches

the stock-broker poured into her ear, it was as much as she could do to sit still. She was heartily glad when the evening drew to an end, and she once more started to drive home. She leant back in the carriage, pretending to sleep. Sir Hilary was not asleep; she could see through a slit in her half-open eyes that he was looking out at the moonlight, with his head bent forward. He helped her carefully to alight, when they stopped, as was his custom, and followed her to her bedroom. She heard his slow footsteps behind her, and an unreasoning dread of his quiet manner, his mysterious dogged silence, oppressed her. When they reached her room he shut the door carefully; then, standing in front of the chair into which she had sunk, he said gently,

“And now, Evelyn, where is your pearl necklace?”

CHAPTER IX.

“I—left it at Cherry and Appleton’s.”

“So I understand; but how comes it that the police have already been informed it is missing, that Mr. Buck, the sanitary engineer, whom we met at dinner to-night, says it is the talk of West Thorpe, and that up to this moment I have not been told of your loss? You must have reasons for this extraordinary behaviour—what are they?”

Sir Hilary’s calm tone reassured his wife, she forgot that he had a magistrate’s training, and was aware from long experience of the disadvantage of flurrying a witness.

“I had better tell you the truth,” she said.

“Certainly, that is the wisest course—if you can.”

“I broke the string of my necklace some

days ago ; it was careless of me, for I knew how particular you were about it, so I stupidly did not tell you, and took the pearls into Cherry and Appleton's to be mended."

"Which day was that?"

"You know, Tuesday last, when you were cross with me."

"Ah—the day you met Dick Carrol."

"Yes."

"Did you tell him about the necklace?"

"Yes—I think I did—he asked me where I had been."

"Exactly, and then ——"

"Then I called for it to-day, and the jeweller said it had been already taken away by a young man."

"Mr. Dick Carrol?"

"Yes, that was what he said—how do you know?"

"Every one knows it now. Buck told me."

"I was very angry, I knew you would reproach me for carelessness. I said that I believed you would never employ Messrs. Cherry and Appleton again ——"

"Why did you not tell me this?"

"Because you were so displeased on

Tuesday, I did not want to annoy you again, and I thought the necklace would be found."

"Lady Fenchurch, that was not your reason. You were afraid to tell me because you knew who had it ——"

"I—who—what do you mean?"

"Is it necessary to explain?—your lover had lost money and you gave him the pearls to pay his racing debts; the devotion of woman is indeed marvellous—I should never have thought it of you—you look so quiet—and you are so impulsive."

"Hilary—no—you cannot——" Evelyn jumped up, and as she did so her cloak slipped down and exposed her dazzling white shoulders and the glittering string of diamonds round her neck. "I swear to you this is not true. I have never told you an untruth yet; indeed, indeed this is not so."

"But you have deceived me already," he said, growing grim in spite of his ruddiness, "and you will deceive me again." Then he sat down, while she looked at him helplessly, wondering what would happen next. She seemed to be assisting at the agony of some other person; now the first moment of

tremor had passed by, she was perfectly calm, and simply waited. Sir Hilary got up again, his face was purple, he seemed wrestling with impotent passion. "That young ass! to think you should befool me so—my God!—what are women made of?"

"Hilary, calm yourself," said Evelyn, and her voice was like the voice of a ghost, it sounded so dim and far away.

"You, whom I was so proud of——" He had not loved her particularly, but he had been proud of her—he had cherished his possession. He grew silent again, and the silence between those two was most oppressive. The bed-candle flickered in lonely twinkling on the large dressing-table, decked out in maize ribbons and white lace; Evelyn in her agitation had omitted to light the stately wax tapers in their silver candlesticks; the room, fitfully illuminated by the fire-rays, was spectral with mysterious darkness and black hidden corners, and from the shadow, Sir Hilary's face, purple and distorted, glared back at her like that of some evil fiend. Evelyn grew frightened, "Oh, Hilary—speak to me, you frighten me."

"To be a laughing-stock—a thing to point

at—to be disgraced—what have you done, Evelyn, what have you done?” He sobbed; a man’s sobs are terrible to listen to.

“Oh, Hilary!” she took him by the arm and tried to soothe him like a child, “believe me there is no harm done ——”

He started from her side. “At least he shall suffer, the brute you prefer to me shall suffer, I will pursue him, hunt him down, he shall stand in a felon’s dock, and I will be there to gloat over his ruin. He is a gentleman, and disgrace will touch him keenly ——”

“Hilary!”

“Yes, madam, I am not good enough, apparently, to command your truth, but I am good enough to be tricked—for you to take jewels and presents from me—you can accept my name, my position, my affection, but you can’t pay me decent respect. Well, we shall see—it is war to the knife between us now.” Before she could answer he had left her, and slammed the door of his dressing-room, where he locked himself in.

Evelyn sat on stonily for a few seconds after his departure—she felt stunned by his violence and incapable of thought. Pre-

sently, however, the force of conventional habit returned, she remembered her maid who was sitting up for her, summoned her, and began to undress. The maid noticed nothing, for Lady Fenchurch was silent but as kind as usual, dismissing her as soon as she put on her pink dressing-gown. When she was alone, Lady Fenchurch looked around nervously and gave a little moan. The moan increased to a smothered sob, and presently tears began slowly to run down her cheeks. How rough and hard Sir Hilary had been, all the greater contrast to his usual polished manner; how he had spoken to her, to her whom men usually bowed down to, deferentially and respectfully adored. Even the vulgar stock-broker had been studiously polite and shown his admiration for her in frank and clumsy fashion. Poor Dick, too, whom she had been so fond of once, (the once a very long time off,) it was hard he should be punished when he was innocent. Poor Dick! Why it was his persistence, his want of tact, his folly, that had brought all the misery upon her. She must not pity him, she must think of herself. she saw her life before her, stretched out

endlessly saddened, by a great shadow of revenge and jealousy and disorder, especially hard to one who loved beauty and pleasantness so much, that she was willing to sacrifice anything for them.

She saw the choleric old man, cruel and consistent in his purpose, standing like a jailor over her. She had wanted so little ; she had been satisfied with her pearls and her pony-carriage and her pleasant boudoir, and now the spirit of discord had scattered all these little happinesses to the wind, and left her shivering and lonely. She remembered to have seen women who had led unhappy domestic lives, one in particular, who had been handsome once, she was assured, who was now a tall, lean, sallow woman with the air of a century of grief upon her pallid cheeks, and unutterable misery in her dead eyes. All the sparkle, the vitality, had gone out of them ; she looked exactly what she was reduced to—a crushed being. And Evelyn then had said to herself that she would never succumb so, that she would always keep her youth, her spirits, her vigour ; now suddenly, for the first time, she conceived a possibility of growing like that

wretched woman, of leading a crushed existence. Love to her meant nothing so much as gratification of vanity; she was too cold for the whirlwind of passion, too shallow for the excitement of danger. She no longer cared for Dick, and yet by some strange grip of Fate he was destined to dog and embitter her days. She sat thus thinking, with a child's wild foolish longing to escape, to fly from the ills and troubles of her lot. She sat thus wide-eyed, a beautiful statue in her straight falling draperies, her delicate nostrils quivering, her hands clasping and unclasping nervously. If she were to lose everything, to lose Dick's love, and her husband's trust, and his presents, and his pride in her beauty and her dresses, what would become of her? She dreaded disgrace as much as he did, but for another reason—because of its discomforts. She never desired a battle-at-arms with the world; she preferred the cordial hand stretched out to bid her welcome, and smooth the crumpled rose-leaves in her path. Just then the stable-clock rang out the hour, two chimes in its full low voice sounded forth upon the still night air. Two o'clock! She must not sit

there any longer, or she would look pale and ill to-morrow. Her beauty was her greatest weapon now. She extinguished the candles with a kind of shivering dread ; it seemed to her as though a spirit presence filled the chamber ; not a sound reached her from her husband's room ; but the old oak panelling cracked and groaned in unearthly fashion ; the hangings seemed, to her high-strung nerves, to wave and rustle strangely. She flung herself quickly into bed, and tried to remember scraps of the hymns of her youth.

When she awoke, Sir Hilary had already gone out riding, and the maid asked her if she would like breakfast in her own room. He had left word she was not to be disturbed. With a sybarite desire to defer the disagreeable as long as possible, she accepted the offer, dawdled over her chocolate, and glanced at the *Morning Post*, trying to imagine that there was nothing changed in her life.

About twelve o'clock she sauntered into the library, where Miss Fenchurch was usually to be found knitting at the interminable piece of work, which grew and grew, and yet never seemed to turn into

anything. She was absent; even her knitting had been carefully folded up and put away.

“Is every one dead in this house?” said Evelyn to herself, smothering a yawn; she had rested badly, and felt cross and tired, but the dread and silly fancies of the night had evaporated. She returned idly to her own boudoir, where the fire burnt brightly, and amused herself by warming her tiny slippers and playing with the pug. When at last the luncheon-bell sounded — hungry, notwithstanding her anxiety, and hoping to obtain some information from her sister-in-law — Evelyn hurried into the dining-room. Only one place was laid, only one chair was drawn up to the table. Then Evelyn, smothering the pride which had hitherto kept her silent (for there is a courage in pride which sometimes shames the finest principle), asked for Miss Fenchurch. The butler looked surprised, and respectfully answered that she had gone out for a drive into West Thorpe, he believed, and left word that no one was to wait luncheon. Evelyn swallowed the meal in solemn silence under the glassy gaze of the irreproachable servants, but she never

knew what she ate, for her appetite had completely deserted her.

“Will your ladyship drive this afternoon?” inquired the obsequious servant, polite and well-drilled, and ready to anticipate her smallest want.

“No, no,” she said, impatiently. “I require nothing; I shall walk.”

As she paced the shrubberies among the dank humid beeches and the brown shoots of the mahonia, a wintry desolation overspread her soul. The soft damp gravel yielded beneath her light tread, and the wet grass edges moistened her skirts. It was dreary—dreary. To gay young hearts, heavy grey skies and perpetual half-tints seem but as the neutral background for their happiness; to sad, sick souls the gloom intensifies the pain and increases the depression. Evelyn just now was sadder than she had ever felt in her life. Only one grief had befallen her before, the death of her father, and then she was too young to pine long. Miss Fenchurch’s kind words and sugarplums, Sir Hilary’s promise of a pony, had sufficed to calm her. And the pony and the sugarplums still served as the symbols of her desires.

Luxury, freedom, and approbation were their names now.

In the evening Miss Fenchurch returned. To all inquiries she only answered that she had been to call on an old friend, the wife of the vicar of West Thorpe, and that not having seen her for some time she had thought it necessary to prolong the visit beyond the limits of a morning call. Miss Fenchurch looked as usual, prim, starched, and matter-of-fact. If she knew anything abnormal had occurred, she was discreet enough to avoid unpleasant allusions. She brought a message from Sir Hilary to the effect that he was detained by business, and should not return until the morrow. Evelyn was forced to be content with scant information ; she chafed at being left like a naughty child out in the cold, but consoled herself by reflecting that probably Sir Hilary was already ashamed of his stormy ebullition of temper, and that when she next beheld him he would be in an angelic and repentant frame of mind. The evening passed sociably enough. Miss Fenchurch knitted, and Evelyn played the piano. There was nothing to denote the smallest ruffling of the

conjugal surface, and when Lady Fenchurch went to bed it was with the fullest intention of making up for the previous night's want of sleep.

CHAPTER X.

BUT when next Evelyn saw her husband she noticed a great and inexplicable change in him. His cheeks were still ruddy, but the red was fixed in dull patches over the cheek-bone, while the remainder of the complexion showed a yellowey white; the mouth was set and hard, the eyes as cold as stones; the merry twinkle that had rendered them, spite of their small size, agreeable and expressive, now disappeared, leaving a filmy impenetrability. Subjected to the strictest scrutiny the eyes gave no clue to the internal emotion. Yet Sir Hilary was perfectly courteous and kind to his wife; all trace of passion had vanished; he addressed her in an ordinary tone, but he avoided all occasions of being alone with her. He confessed to being very busy, and seemed absorbed in papers. To

Evelyn, when she first greeted him with a somewhat anxious smile, he said casually that she need not distress herself about the necklace, for that it would probably soon be restored to its owner, and the tone of his voice as he said this was unpleasantly satirical, but Evelyn only remarked that she was glad, and he made no further observation. His glance fell upon her for a moment curiously, as if to see whether any hidden meaning lay under her equanimity, but apparently unable to detect anything suspicious in her manner he presently removed his eyes from her face. Yet all the time, though nothing was said, though the machinery of routine appeared admirably well-oiled, Evelyn felt as though she were walking over a volcano, felt as the traveller in an Alpine pass who sees the bridge fall away behind him into the bottomless ravine, or as the dwellers under the shadow of a lava mountain, who, awe-struck, listen to the almost inaudible mutterings of the terrific forces of nature, which at any unexpected moment may burst forth and overwhelm their humble homestead. The sense of the inscrutable, the sense of suspense, the sense of insecurity,

adds to the horrors of death, and the inevitable can be even more serenely faced than the possible or improbable. Her misgivings were not entirely unfounded, for on Monday Sir Hilary announced that there was a warrant out against Dick Carrol, and that he hoped soon to see him safely lodged in jail.

“You have done this, Hilary?” cried Evelyn, the peculiar rich creaminess of her complexion turning to a sickly yellow as she gazed at her husband with large horror-struck eyes. “Why, he is an innocent man!”

“So you say; well, if he is innocent he can easily prove it, but the facts are damnable against him.” Sir Hilary recapitulated what we know already. That Dick’s losses on Fairy Queen had been heavy, that he had paid up everything rigidly, that on the day after Evelyn’s first visit to the jeweller, when, as she herself confessed, she told Mr. Carrol of the broken necklace, a young man, distinctly identified as Dick, by the foreman of the shop and a boy who happened to be present, called and took away the pearls. “Now let him clear himself if he can,” said Sir Hilary, rubbing his hands.

“You have done an infamous thing,” said Evelyn, forgetting her terror in the anger her husband’s conduct evoked; “you did this out of spite, though I told you as solemnly as I could, that both he and I were innocent.”

“You told me so, certainly. But once before you did not speak the truth, and I never, a second time, trust a person who has already deceived me.”

“But this is horrible.”

“Well, you see, if you and I quarrelled there would be a scandal; I don’t like scandals in families; this is a pleasant and easy way of punishing you both, for you must stand by me under pain of being considered a wicked wife. Besides which, Carrol will think that I do all this under your influence and put it down to your displeasure at his marriage. I have thought it all out well. I don’t wish my little plot to fail—I have taken every precaution.”

Evelyn buried her face in her hands. Sir Hilary seemed at that instant to reveal the nature of a fiend incarnate. It was difficult to believe that the elderly gentleman before her, with mild blue eyes and innocent mut-

ton-chop whiskers, could be capable of so refined and cruel a revenge, a revenge that savoured rather of Machiavelli and an astute Italian than of the easy morality of the nineteenth century, where a woman solaces her wounded feelings with a fat bundle of bank-notes, and a man consoles himself for his wife's neglect in the mercenary arms of a fashionable actress. Yet there he stood on the hearth-rug in a frivolous modern boudoir, whose walls were hung with blue china and peacock's feathers, where yellow vases competed for notice on the little crazy Chippendale tables, and a flavour of heliotrope and patchouli, and highly-scented flowers, pervaded the air. The idea was so thoroughly mediæval, the surroundings so purely modern, that the antithesis almost reached absurdity. But the discrepancy only increased her horror.

“ Oh, Hilary ! reflect,” she cried in agonized tones.

“ You are afraid for your lover ? ”

“ He is not my lover—you know he is not.”

“ Do you mean to say that no love passages have passed between you ? ”

“Yes, before my marriage, not since.”

“Did he not pursue you to Switzerland, even in your honeymoon?”

“But not at my wish.”

“How can I tell? He was there, I saw you together with my own eyes, but I did not believe then what I know now.”

Evelyn sank back in her chair overwhelmed. With such cold obstinacy it was impossible to reason—all she could say would not convince him. And the vengeance he meant to wreak was so neatly and ingeniously planned that she was in duty bound to seem to lend herself to it.

“You will have to appear in the witness-box, and say that you told Carrol about the necklace—how will he like that, I wonder?”

“I—never!” Evelyn started up and her fine eyes sparkled with fire. She was pale but she was determined; she drew herself to her full height, and flashed contempt at her husband. “Do you think I will help you in your vile plot? Never! I am perfectly certain Mr. Carrol has nothing whatever to do with the robbery, if robbery there has been. How do I know it is not all an

arranged conspiracy, hatched by you in your mad folly. Mr. Carrol is a *gentleman* !”

“And you mean to say I am not? At least I shall guard the honour of my name—that shall not be dragged in the mud. Take care, do not defy me; you think I am easy-going and forgiving; so I am in ordinary matters; you might have had anything in reason you pleased to ask for—you were an old man’s darling,” he hissed out these words with concentrated bitterness, “but you have fooled me, and I never forgive *that*.”

Evelyn shrugged her shoulders and did not answer.

Sir Hilary saw the movement, and it roused him into madness. “You defy me?” he cried, hoarse with excitement, “you dare defy me?”

“I do not defy you—I wish you would be calm. You are trying to ruin this young man, and for aught I know you may succeed. What will you be the better for it? If I loved you, you have done me an irreparable wrong by your suspicions; if, on the contrary, I do not love you and wish to deceive you, do you not think you are giving me a powerful excuse by your behaviour?”

“Fine words, nothing but fine words”—Sir Hilary stamped his foot. “You women are all the same; if one listens to you for a moment one is humbugged. Oh yes! all you say is very plausible no doubt—exceedingly plausible. I must do you the justice, my lady, to say that you speak very well, but—the glamour is gone; you can hoodwink me no longer. Just one thing more, do not try to frustrate the ends of justice, or it will be worse for you; you will only render me the more pitiless, and make your own position unbearable.”

“I think it is unbearable now,” said Evelyn, in quiet despair. She had energy to flash out for a moment, but her natural love of ease soon took the upper hand. She objected no longer. If she could not save Dick it was no use wearing herself out in vain struggles. Sir Hilary had no key to her character. He thought threats and violence were the means necessary to govern refractory women. Having hitherto spoilt her, and treated her with exaggerated courtesy, he now lapsed into the opposite extreme, and allowed a greater scope to his brutality than a less polished person might

have dared. The trammels of habit and politeness being removed, there seemed no alternative but unbridled passion; and the passion of jealousy and foiled vanity is stronger than the passion of love—it is more calculating and more thorough.

So Sir Hilary failed to comprehend Evelyn's quietude, he thought she was cowed, when she was only weary and disgusted. She said nothing, but sat, meditatively, with her hands folded in her lap.

“Are you satisfied?” he asked, stopping suddenly in his fierce back-and-forward tramp, “are you satisfied? If your position is unbearable, what is mine? and yet we are forced to live together for years, as long as I am alive, like this, dragging our miserable galley-slave existence, I knowing all your treachery, you bitterly regretting the loss of your lover!”

“I see nothing that forces us to live together.”

“The laws of society, madam! which I, for my part, do not intend to break. You are my wife, and you shall remain so, and I will exact every inch of your duty towards me!—every inch! You understand?”

“I hear,” said Evelyn, passively.

And her very passivity lashed his fury higher. What hold had he over a yielding indifferent woman, who seemed to feel neither sorrow nor anger? Her cold contempt cut him to the core. He was punishing her, and yet she seemed to feel the punishment less than he did himself. His anger got the better of his prudence, in another instant he felt that he must strike her. Perhaps she wished this; perhaps she meant to goad him into some act of unmanly violence. He pressed his lips tightly together; the last few days of emotion had riddled his face with furrows; he looked old and ghastly, instead of ruddier and younger than his age, as he had been wont. He sought to regain his self-control, while that statuesque woman sat on in her silence, braving him, as he thought, by her indifference. He dared not trust himself to speak again; he walked to the door, opened it, and strode out. Evelyn listened to his heavy tread resounding down the passage, then she turned to lift the pug, who was affectionately rubbing himself against her gown, and stroked him absently. What was to be

done? Was anything to be done? she asked herself anxiously. Now that the thunderbolt had fallen, it was with a sense of gratitude that Evelyn felt she knew the worst. She knew now what the shadow was she had unconsciously dreaded; she knew the exact measure of Sir Hilary's vengeance, and his intentions towards her. These chiefly occupied her mind. Dick must fight his own battles, and, as he was innocent, he would probably fight them successfully, but she—where could she seek a deliverer? She bethought herself of Miss Fenchurch. The old maid had hitherto been kind though formal. She had influence with her brother and was devoted to him. It was to her interest to heal this unhappy breach in the family, and it was certainly to her that Evelyn must look for assistance. She rose calmly, too dazed and stunned for tears, and went to the library. Miss Fenchurch was knitting, a bunch of household-keys lay on the table beside her. By degrees she had resumed the charge of the household, Evelyn caring less for supposed authority than for her own ease. Miss Fenchurch looked up as her sister-in-law entered, but without speak-

ing. The room, plainly furnished as a gentleman's library, was dull and homely, the red morocco covers of the chairs faded, the Turkey carpet worn in several places, the heavy furniture old-fashioned, but the large bay window let in every ray of sunshine, and showed a wide sweep of clear blue sky. The general effect was cheerful and comfortable. The library was Miss Fenchurch's favourite resort, and here she sat the greater part of the day knitting, or writing letters, and interviewing servants and poor people. She could never be persuaded to take kindly to Evelyn's boudoir, which she irreverently designated as gimcrack, and choke full of rubbish.

"Well, Rachel, are you very busy?" said Evelyn, amiably by way of opening the conversation.

"Busy, I'm always busy; if young people didn't sit idle the devil would not have so much to do."

"I suppose you mean me, by young people, Rachel?" Evelyn seated herself beside Miss Fenchurch, and watched the plying of the shining needles sending back and forth their unceasing sparkle. "I wish you

would not always preach at me, but say what you have to say straightforwardly."

"I have nothing to say." Miss Fenchurch compressed her lips primly; "I prefer to mind my own business."

"You are quite right there, but still you know, Rachel, there are times when people's duty is to mind some one else's business."

"Indeed!" The old maid knitted faster. Her fingers seemed to fly.

"Don't look as if you didn't care, or were in church where talking isn't allowed. I want to speak to you."

"Well, I am listening."

"Sir Hilary and I have had a quarrel."

"I am very sorry to hear it. The ladies of this house have always hitherto lived on good terms with their husbands. There has never been any scandal, yet."

"I assure you I dislike scandal as much as you, but if a man will not believe you, and flies away at a tangent with some stupid idea he has concocted in his own brain, what is to be done then?"

"It is very unfortunate," Miss Fenchurch said, without raising her eyes.

"But I want your advice."

“I have none to give. I do not relish putting my hand between the bark and the tree.”

“If you wish to avert scandal you must. Rachel, be kind to me; I’m very young and you are much older and wiser.”

Evelyn laid her cheek gently against Miss Fenchurch’s brown serge sleeve. The old maid made an imperceptible gesture as if to shake her off, and replied:

“One cannot require old heads on young shoulders, but one has a right to expect modesty in a young wife.”

“Modesty, do you believe——?”

“I believe nothing, I know nothing, I am only stating my opinions.”

“Rachel, I don’t wish to quarrel with Hilary.”

“That I can well imagine—you would lose too much.”

“I want you to make it up between us.”

“Then I must decline. It is not my business. Any interference with my brother’s private affairs, I should consider extremely impertinent.”

“But my affairs concern you.”

“Pardon me, you only concern me as my

brother's wife. He is the head of the family and has a right to my respect."

"Ah! then you don't care what happens to me."

"I should be sorry if any harm came to you, but at the same time my brother claims my first devotion and duty."

"And with those cold words, and with that selfish policy, you dismiss me?"

Miss Fenchurch gave a deprecatory shake of the head.

"Well then let me tell you, you are taking the most admirable way to secure the scandal of which you spoke just now. I appeal to my husband, he is blinded by passion and will not listen. I appeal to my sister-in-law, she is blinded by prejudiced selfishness, and cannot attend. I am alone, an orphan, young and inexperienced, you are both of you trying to drive me to destruction."

"You use hard words. But a woman's own virtue is her best safeguard. I cannot drive you to do anything you do not choose," said Miss Fenchurch, interrupting her knitting, and for the first time looking straight through her spectacles at Evelyn. "I forgive you, for I remember you are young,

and not accustomed to contradiction, but you are unjust, another fault of youth, perhaps."

"If I am wrong," said Evelyn, throwing herself exhaustedly back in her chair, "tell me what you wish, what you are aiming at?"

"I wish you and Hilary to live on good, affectionate, and peaceable terms, as husband and wife should—as my father and mother did."

"Perhaps your father and mother were not tried as I am," said Evelyn, impatiently.

"No one is spared all annoyance; no doubt they had their troubles, but they bore them like gentlefolks, quietly, patiently, nobly."

"Hilary is not gentle, Hilary is not patient."

"My dear, you must understand that the wrong under which Hilary suffers is not one a man can bear patiently; men's feelings are different from ours, they are stronger, more human, perhaps, we cannot judge. Hilary loves you."

"Does he?" answered Evelyn, bitterly. "I do not think so, or he would believe what I say."

"Men are hard to convince."

“Can’t you help me?”

“There is no help possible, that I can see, but to subdue your pride, and to cast yourself upon my brother’s mercy.”

“He has no mercy, and you have no heart, or you would feel for a poor girl like me, who has no one to advise her, and is very unhappy.”

Evelyn jumped up as she spoke, and turned to the window. She could scarcely restrain her tears, but her pride would not permit her to shed them in the presence of one who arrogated to herself rather the right to condemn, than the privilege of soothing a grief she could not understand. She gazed out of the window. The garden with its neat brown beds, where the crocus-heads showed little green tips, stretched peacefully before her; blackbirds pecked on the grassy lawn, and a fine thrush flew past at that moment. Leaves were beginning to burgeon; worms and insects to emerge from their long winter slumber; there was a springlike vigour and anticipation in the air, and she alone stood like some poor criminal waiting to be lectured and advised.

“I strongly recommend you to be meek

and humble, it is far more appropriate in a woman ; you will disarm my brother by submission, and you can never hope to battle against his will. His determination, his energy, is greater than yours ; though an elderly man he is hale and hearty, and has all the vigour of youth ; a woman must be defeated in any real contest with a man in the position of my brother ; believe me, give in now and you will live to see the justice of my counsel." Miss Fenchurch droned on in a flatly monotonous voice. "And if I humiliate myself, what then—what can you promise me ?" A vision of peace crossed Evelyn's mind for an instant ; if the price were not too heavy, perhaps she would pay it, and restore to herself her comforts, her ease, her husband's indulgence.

"What can you promise me?"

"Forgiveness, and, in time, reinstallation into favour. Those are reasonable terms."

"And meanwhile to be treated like a culprit, to be watched and suspected, and scolded, for I know he would find fault, and you too, in your cold reproving fashion ; no, no, I had rather manage my own affairs, only remember this, whatever happens, Hilary's

obstinacy and your want of sympathy have driven me to it."

"Hilary's obstinacy!"

No one had ever spoken so disrespectfully of her brother before; the old maid clasped her hands in horror, and peered over the top of her spectacles, but Evelyn did not stay to hear the comment on her daring speech. She opened the window and let herself out into the garden, where, to complete her utter infringement of all the rules of propriety, she ran along the gravelled paths bonnetless.

"Young folks, young folks!" muttered the old maid to herself, "God grant us grace to be patient with them." It was then that Evelyn decided to send for Dick, and to write the letter which reached him a few days later.

CHAPTER XI.

THE fir plantation was an extremely secluded spot about a mile and a half from Oakdene, and especially suitable for a secret meeting. To approach it, it was necessary to traverse some rough, boggy, common land, broken by shallow streamlets, where sedges and coarse grasses flourished luxuriantly. In the summer-time the foreground lay bathed in a rich glow of purple and violet heather; in the winter the cold north wind shrieked and whistled over the bare, brown hillsides, which showed dark against the chilly sky. Beyond the common was the fir plantation, to which a winding, sandy road gave access. Following this road for a short distance, and turning to the left along a narrow foot-track, you suddenly came to a slope where, viewed

through a columned vista of red pine stems, cool green woods bounded the horizon. Under these pine-trees, where the earth was dry and strewn with an aromatic carpet of fir-needles, and the air gently moaned in a kind of suave harmony among the tree-tops, was the spot chosen by Evelyn to meet her lover. Above, the sky was clear and blue, around, the whispering green wood wrapped them in an enchanted mantle of slumbrous silence; no profane eye could peer in unobserved, no profane ear surprise their talk. Dick knew the spot; he had ridden that way as a short cut from West Thorpe to the other side of the county, and he had always admired the straight and splendid proportions of the thick-leaved pines. But it was with deep reluctance that he obeyed Evelyn's commands to-day. His own position was extremely irksome and precarious, he did not desire to rouse Sir Hilary's anger by clandestine meetings, and the business of the election rendered it very difficult for him to absent himself even for a few hours; besides this, idle dalliance was at that instant far enough from his thoughts. Fair as a woman may be and desirable as she may seem, yet if

she intrudes herself upon his notice at a moment when her presence evokes unpleasant memories, or her interests require special self-denial or exertion on his part, there is scarcely any young man who will not immediately experience a decided cooling off in his amorous inclinations. An unwilling lover is colder than a person who is no lover at all—he is more selfish, more cautious, more exacting. The right diapason is always difficult to catch; the moment a woman leans towards a man that moment he starts back. Dick was engaged, he did not love Luce, but he felt that with her was happiness, and safety, pecuniary advantage even if Mr. Highview, as was most likely, dowered her liberally; with Lady Fenchurch, on the contrary, he faced only disgrace, fear, and snatched hours of bliss, which, conferred against his will, might turn into endless spaces of torment. Still he never thought of shrinking from the consequences of his own undisciplined emotions, he never for an instant suggested to himself that he could desert the woman he had loved so deeply; he only desired that propitious circumstances might render self-sacrifice unnecessary, for, above all, whatever

his faults, Dick was a gentleman, that is to say, his innate nobleness forbade him to injure a woman. He had a chivalrous regard for the fair sex, and, indeed, would not have hurt a hair of any one's head could he have avoided it. But the consequences of our actions do not seem the less bitter because we have drawn them on ourselves; the apple of love is as much dead-sea fruit when we have at the cost of infinite pain stretched out our hand to seize it, as when it has been merely thrust into our unwilling hands. When Dick rode up to the fir plantation he wished women, love, and marriage, at the devil, he wished he had never seen Evelyn, and he fervently wished that she would have arranged her own affairs with her husband and left him peaceably to pursue his own adventures. Moodily he climbed the sandy road, where he tied his horse to a strong young fir-tree. Even the soft and quiet beauty of the spot scarcely reconciled him to the odious half-hour that was in store. Shafts of light flashed through the deep green branches, and shot the tender mosses with gold, and the bright red stems with deeper colour. Down in the hollow the firs

and evergreens formed masses of glossy vivid green, and the branches, moving softly, sighed and whispered above his head. On a bank of heather, dry as was everything under the broad canopy of the pine-trees, he found Evelyn, looking prettier than ever in her dark furs and hat with scarlet-tipped feathers, waiting for him.

“I am in time, surely,” he said, pulling out his watch as she stretched forth her hand to him.

“Oh yes, yes, I was too soon—I was anxious.”

“Do you know it was very imprudent of you to come here?” he said, looking suspiciously round; “we may be watched.”

She had sunk back again on the mossy seat; he stood uneasily in front of her. They certainly did not seem like a pair of lovers, and yet nothing could well be more compromising than their interview. “I felt that I must see you,” she answered, sadly. The positions were reversed. She who had been queen, who had held him at arm’s length, from the height of her grace and dignity, now humbly sued for an attention which

he only gave her grudgingly, coldly, and abstractedly.

“What had you to say?” he asked, resigning himself to the inevitable, and sitting beside her on the mossy bank.

“How changed you are,” she said, softly, without a trace of her usual gay coquetry; “how changed! I scarcely think you still love me.”

“Listen!” he said. “In a day or two comes the polling, I am over head and ears in business; thanks to your—husband, and his vile accusations, I shall probably lose the election and perhaps my grandmother’s fortune; everything at this instant is trembling in the balance, another week may see me a ruined man; is this the time to talk of love?”

“I am unhappy,” she said, simply; “and through you—through your imprudence and folly ——”

“So am I unhappy. God knows I curse myself for my folly—I have been idiotic—mad—accept my deep regret—still, how can I help you?”

“Oh, Dick, say a kind word to me, think what you used to protest and vow—how you told me I was dearer to you than anything

on earth—think what you asked me in Switzerland.”

“I was a fool,” he said, roughly. “You were wise then—why not let us be wise now?”

“Because my life is wretched—because my husband suspects me, and hates me, and because I have none but *you*, Dick.” He did not answer; he looked moodily on the ground, and made little holes in the moss with his riding-cane. The tears coursed down Evelyn’s cheeks as she spoke, clear pearl-like tears streaming from those beautiful brown eyes which it had been his privilege to compare to stars. “You cannot desert me,” she said, with a sob.

“Of course, I shall not leave you in any difficulty; of course, we must support each other—though I don’t see what good I can be to you—why, for instance, run this unnecessary risk?—if your husband surprised you here with me, what would he say?—it would justify all his suspicions.”

“He is gone into West Thorpe, and is not likely to come here. Oh, Dick, I do not understand you.” Dick scarcely understood himself, he only knew that the former fasci-

nation of beauty left him calm and impassive, that event he tears which dropped from her star-like eyes irritated instead of melting him, and that it was with difficulty he restrained himself from addressing rough words to her, and reproving her for the folly, which was leading him and herself into danger.

“ Did you only wish to see me in order to ask me to stand by you? Surely you know me well enough to know I should behave honourably in the matter; or did you think me a thief—shall I swear to you that I am innocent?”

“ As if I did not know that—of course you are—but we are both terribly unfortunate—however, never mind that now, what is done, is done; don’t look so gloomy, talk to me a little, I want to be comforted.” Dick’s handsome face was clouded with annoyance; a man hates to feel he has committed an egregious mistake; his eyes were still bent on the ground and the holes with which the moss at his feet was now perforated. He was restless, unhappy, dissatisfied with himself and his companion.

“Dick, Dick, have you no heart?” she proceeded, reproachfully. “Don’t you feel for me? remember how happy I used to be before I met you;” the tears coursed down again faster.

“Don’t cry, pray don’t cry, I can’t bear to see you unhappy,” he said, with a clumsy attempt at sympathy.

“Can’t you, really?” she answered, more cheerfully, looking up and drying her eyes. “Am I still precious to you? if I were alone and friendless would you not forsake me? if Sir Hilary is too dreadfully cruel, and makes my life a penance, would you care for me and help me?”

‘It is far better we should not meet again—don’t you see why? Sir Hilary is an old man, in the course of nature he cannot live long, I think it is your duty to try and please him and get on well ——’

“You never spoke like that in the old days,” she said, opening her eyes with surprise. “I tell you I am miserable, *miserable*; you don’t know what that house is like, how gloomy, how dull, how dreary. I wander about without a soul to speak to all day.”

Her voice had a ring of passion mixed with the sorrow.

“Lady Fenchurch, you possess carriages, and servants, and friends, and you can pay visits ——”

“Lady Fenchurch!—oh—then you have quite forgotten everything.”

“I have not forgotten that you begged me never to call you Evelyn again.”

“That is all changed now; I never expected Sir Hilary would turn out a Tartar.”

“And I never expected you would care for my attentions again. You spurned them once. You snubbed me.” The young man’s voice grew hard and bitter; he was working himself up to a sense of injury – it is so much easier to quarrel with a person under a feeling of angry grievance—“and now I am engaged to be married.”

“Yes, to a plain girl whom you don’t love.”

Lady Fenchurch’s eyes flashed. She looked supremely handsome.

“I respect and like her extremely.”

“And you are content with that? I

compliment you ; you are more easily pleased than in the old days."

"You yourself taught me not to regret the old days."

Evelyn was silent. She never contemplated the possibility that Dick might change. She had felt so sure of her own influence, her unchallenged supremacy, that she thought to play with him, to cast him from her, and to bring him to her feet again without difficulty. She despised the power poor Luce could wield, and believed that her star must pale whenever handsome Evelyn willed it so. Dick's coldness puzzled and annoyed her. She forgot her grief for a moment in her desire to win him back ; she deployed the witchery and charm that had drawn him to her formerly ; she ceased complaints, and sought to bring a smile to his lips. And at last she succeeded. Dick was human. He was not impervious to woman's wiles and to the magnet of persuasive beauty.

"And you do love me a little bit still ; you haven't forgotten me quite ; you will befriend me and serve me when I need it,

and I ask you," she said after a while, triumphantly.

"Certainly I will; I have promised you this; but pray do not be reckless, remember how horribly precarious my situation is, and how very happy and comfortable you are at Oakdene."

"Not while Sir Hilary torments me," said Evelyn, with a pout.

"Well, try your best to be conciliatory; pray, for my sake; what should we do, you and I, cast adrift upon the world without a penny?"

"You only think of yourself."

"No, indeed; I think of you." He glanced at her tasteful dress, her pretty hat, and her delicately-gloved hands. "You are not fitted for poverty; I could not bear to see you without proper comforts, fragile and tender as you are; believe me, let us try to avert such a calamity at any price."

"To be with me a calamity?" she looked prettily reproachful.

"No; but a calamity for you to be unhappy, dear."

"Ah, you speak very kindly and con-

siderately," she said, in a discouraged voice; "but I believe you do not care for me, really. I am a burden; you wish to be rid of me."

He assured her somewhat lamely she was mistaken, but Evelyn was too clever to be easily deceived.

These two people in one of the most solemn and critical moments of their lives played a game of finessing and skill together, trying to conceal the true thoughts of their hearts by the unreal words on their lips. Neither was happy, but each tried to reassure the other. Neither believed in the other, and both sought to drown the suspicion as it rose. Her vanity, her love of luxury and admiration, prompted her to desire his allegiance; his selfishness taught him to profess the affection he could not feel. A melancholy ending surely to the bright dream of love they had both once nursed. A sufficient proof, had one been needed, that love based on self can never stand the stress of tribulation. The woman, beautiful and perfect in her hour of prosperity, seemed to him now but a poor toy for which to risk all; she,

perhaps, of the two, was least actuated by sordid motives; for, though she sought assistance from him, she really experienced the kindness and sympathy he only professed. Spite of himself Dick felt the difference in the love of the two women who competed for his heart—the love of Luce and the love of Evelyn. He saw that the one was pure and guileless, the other polluted with self-interest. And as they parted affectionately in appearance, he thought, “Provided only she will consent to be sensible and cease to make fresh difficulties and discords, and just let these evil times pass over till something fortunate occurs.” And she said to herself, “If I can only regain my old hold over him so that he shall not desert me, but be ever there; a protector in case of need, a resource in moments of dullness, provided I can show him this is his duty, so that I may trust to his sense of honour.” And under the still solemn trees in the sweet hush of nature they parted, their hearts full of wild and bitter thoughts. She glided off with her graceful dainty movements through the trees away into the blue distance, to the home

which was now wretched and discordant, and left her lover alone, unhappy, disappointed, tied and bound in honour to the woman who had become to him a burden and a torment.

CHAPTER XII.

BRUCE sat writing at the little old mahogany table in the inn window surrounded by books and papers, his brow clouded with thought. Occasionally he dropped his pen, and looked out on to the narrow street, busy with market-carts and gay with foot-passengers wending their careless way along. But his gaze was the abstract gaze of the thinker who knows and sees nothing of the common world around him ; he noticed none of the little street scenes, the universal comedies, the dramas of life and passion being enacted before him. For him the ideal surpassed the actual. His thoughts were introspective, inductive ; he was seeking to reconstruct the past, to evolve from the fragments that survived, a perfect picture of a long-vanished state of society. And so

long as his thoughts were thus busily occupied, his brain active, his heart dormant, so long he was happy. Sometimes, however, when his dull weary brain flagged, the pen fell from his nerveless hand, the tired limbs relaxed their cramped attitude, and nature reasserted herself over intellect—then the shadow of a great loneliness fell upon him, and he sighed unconsciously. The life of the intellect is splendid, but it is incomplete; the sage himself is wise, because he knows this. Pascal, abjuring the love of woman, cast himself in abject adoration at the feet of a great and terrible God, Goethe compelled his weighty intellect to toy with the simple worship of a child. The common passions of humanity could not content such men; their aspirations—seeking, groping blindly—soared ever higher and higher until they accepted loneliness; the solitude of the spirit is the earnest and penalty of genius. The great thinker, the great reformer, must ever be lonely; it is only on the bleak heights—the storm-swept mountain-top—that the eagle builds his eyrie. He feels a void, but perhaps in that void lies his greatness, the future in its germ; or

perhaps it is but the natural craving of the flesh for gratification, the rebelling of the material against the immaterial, the gentle reminder that we are human. Be that as it may, Bruce was human, though he had a great intellect and a supreme love of work, and he occasionally felt lonely, felt so especially when he looked around and compared his fate with that of others—bright, busy butterflies, to whom love and happiness seemed to come without effort or desire. It needed merely that they should be good-looking, young, and easy tempered, and the world's benefits were showered in their laps. They toiled not, neither did they spin; but others toiled and spun for them, and they reaped the benefit. They were not troubled either by fears, forebodings, or anxiety such as beset other men, and in their security lay their strength. They faced the world bravely, unquestioningly, with faith and hope, and faith and hope never proved barren. Dick, for instance, how had he deserved the love of a woman like Luce, whose heart-strings might crack in the terrible strain to which they were subjected, but who would remain true to the core? And friends, too

—what kept Bruce devoted to him, so that even his own work suffered while he laboured for his friend? Was it Dick's insouciance, was it his careless friendship, a friendship so lukewarm that for years it had not seemed to him worth while to seek out the humble, toiling student? Vague and unsatisfactory as the answers to these questions might be, Bruce felt that Dick could rest secure in his affection, and in that of his old grandmother, who in her simple fashion loved and trusted him implicitly. Bruce argued to himself that he advocated friendship as a duty, a privilege, and a pleasure; that the object was independent of the method of application; that love for one special person meant but the focussing into one point of the general love of humanity. He took up his pen again with rigid determination, and wrote on continuously till the door opened and admitted Dick, heated, wearied, and somewhat cross. A compulsory love-scene possesses some special quality of acrid irritation. Dick felt angry with himself and angry with Evelyn for exposing him to self-contempt.

“Dick, I have wanted you,” said Bruce, cheerfully, looking up from his work with

a gentle smile ; “ there is still so much to be done, and Mr. Highview will be here shortly. Have you lunched ? ”

“ Yes, no,” Dick threw himself on to a sofa ; “ I don’t want any luncheon.”

“ Have you thought about your speech to-night ? a good deal will depend upon that.”

“ I’m sick of this speechifying,” said Dick, rubbing his fingers through his hair ; “ I shall be heartily glad when it’s all over. I don’t care a fig whether I get in or not now.”

Julian sighed ; after the pains bestowed on his pupil, such an answer could scarcely be considered satisfactory.

“ Oh yes, I hear you sigh, and know all you are going to say. You’re always scribbling, and I’m ungrateful, and a sinner, and everything that is bad. Don’t you ever mean to stop working, Julian ? ”

“ How can I ? there is so much to do. I suppose when I am dead it will be said of me, ‘ he died learning.’ ”

“ Why the deuce do you talk of dying ? I don’t know what’s come to you, old fellow ; you’re gloomy enough for anything. I sup-

pose it is being with me—I'm certainly not cheerful."

"You are naturally anxious," remarked Bruce.

"I'm not anxious about the election, but the thought of disgrace, of a jail, is never absent from my mind."

"I have not much fear of that; but now come let us discuss your speech."

"What a friend you are Julian, I wish I had half your energy," said Dick, still not moving from the sofa. "I can't get up any interest in politics."

"No interest in politics? Why, they are all important, the first duty of a citizen; the most engrossing study a man can devote himself to."

"Your ideas are not of the usual order; as a rule politics mean ambition, and the advantages a man can get for himself from a government or a party," said Dick, lazily.

"True; perhaps you are too young to care for these things yet. I suppose love occupies all your thoughts now."

"Love! I hate the sound of the word."

"Indeed then I am at a loss how to pre-

scribe; love palls upon you, patriotism leaves you cold.'

"We have not mentioned patriotism; I suppose I should fight for my country if I were a soldier; in fact, I think that is what I am best fitted for."

"Patriotism means love of country; to be a good citizen one must have public feeling; what is that but politics? we are arguing in a circle."

"You will say next, that to vote at an election is a kind of religion."

"Not religion, but a part of it. Citizenship is as important a factor in public life as family life, and, though religion cannot make you clever, it ought to teach you to be an honest man. It is the divorce in the code of principle between private life and public life that causes all the mischief. People do not choose to see the political significance of certain rules of action, and thus in trying to be loyal to their party they become faithless to their own soul.

"I never think of my soul especially," remarked Dick. "There is time enough for that."

"Saving your soul does not mean going

to church and mumbling long prayers, it means keeping it pure, and true, and untroubled, and that is as necessary for a politician as a sinner, perhaps more necessary, for there is such a thing as the conventional political conscience — a composite article made up of bribes, prejudices, compromises, and expediency.”

“A kind of old man of the sea, I suppose! Thank Heaven I have no conscience.”

“Don’t say such things. I never believe men who boast of their vices. What I meant to say was, that ecclesiastical tendencies may be wrong, old-fashioned, or harmful, Christian feeling never.”

“I did not know you were a bigot, Julian. I thought you preferred history to the Thirty-nine Articles.”

“Did I speak of the Thirty-nine Articles? My religion teaches me to believe in the omnipotence of the principle of good, in the joy of doing, and the reality of truth. Religious men have neglected politics, they have allowed them to become the arena of all the bad passions, of the strife and clash of envy and discontent. They have wrapped themselves in the mantle of indifference, and

thanked God they were not as other men ; they have ignored the love of their country, and forgotten the rich promise of the future bequeathed us by our fathers ; they ——”

“Stop, my dear fellow ! I must think of my speech, and you are giving me a sermon.”

Bruce laughed. Warmed with his subject, and carried away in an excess of enthusiasm, he forgot that he was speaking aloud, in a language that seemed Greek to the young man beside him. He checked himself, and patiently produced a clean sheet of foolscap and a pencil, and handed them to Dick, who condescended to shake himself like a great sleepy bear, and to rise and walk up and down the room cigar in mouth, a practice that he said assisted the brain. Julian threw in a word or suggested a sentiment occasionally, and the speech was progressing fairly when Mr. Highview knocked at the door. He was accompanied by Gubbins as lively and alert as ever.

“Well, how goes it ?” said Mr. Highview. “Working I perceive ; that’s right. I like to see young men in earnest.”

Dick made a face, and Gubbins remarked, "I'm very hopeful now, very hopeful. Sir Hilary's last speeches have been extremely wild, his conduct strange; seems to have lost his head; people are disgusted with him; they think that attack of his upon you a mean business."

"They don't believe it then?" said Dick, looking up quickly.

"Believe it! bless you, no—put it down to an election dodge. The thing was so unlikely."

"After all, Dick, there is some good in being a gentleman," interposed Mr. Highview, kindly. Thanks to Luce's persuasion he had espoused Dick's cause far more warmly than he had ever thought possible. With some difficulty he disposed of Lady Eleanor's entreaties that he would stand himself for Parliament, and entered heart and soul into the young man's prospects.

"We'll pull you through, my boy!" he said, heartily. "We'll pull you through!"

"Inspire him with a sense of responsibility, Mr. Highview," said Bruce, gravely. "He is not earnest enough; tell him his duty to his country demands an effort."

“ Oh yes, of course, duty to your country, and all that you know, it sounds well, not but what a man’s own interests are generally the stronger influence.”

“ Bruce talks as if a politician were a kind of high priest,” said Dick with a smile.

“ Ah yes, quite right ; Church and State, though I am not myself what is usually called a religious man, never was troubled with doubts, always went to church as an example—but I can’t stand too much of the parsons; they’re narrow you know, Bruce, very narrow,” said Mr. Highview, promptly.

“ And we are not narrow,” put in Gubbins. “ Breadth is the guiding principle of the Liberal party, breadth in views, breadth in doctrine, breadth in practice, liberty in unity, you know, widen wherever you can, pull down barriers to progress, enlightened catholic views, respect for the individual, and all that kind of thing.”

“ Take care lest in widening everything you yourselves and your party slip through the breach, and are swallowed up in a wave of devastation,” said Mr. Highview.

“ Devastation, my dear sir ? It is we who preserve the liberties of the people; every

man's prerogative is sacred to us—we are no respecters of persons.”

“Quite so,” said Bruce; “there ought to be no opposition between the ideas of freedom and order; unfortunately, history teaches us that in doing battle for the one, men are frequently arrayed against the other.”

“History!” said Mr. Gubbins, jumping up, “I don't care two pins for history; it's actuality, the practical, that matters. Why, sir, I have a map of all the constituencies—the Liberal electors are increasing everywhere; I mark them red, the red threatens to cover the whole of the map. That's a truer criterion than your mouldy one-sided histories. How can any man write impartially? It stands to reason, each of us is a partizan of our own side, we shouldn't be men if we weren't; well, then, how can you believe history? it only represents the opinions of the writer.”

“Mr. Bruce here is a historian.”

“Indeed, sir! well, I beg your pardon if I've hurt your feelings, but at least you are a Liberal, so your history is sure to be all right and satisfactory.”

“Now, now to business,” said Mr. High-

view, impatiently; "we did not come to talk of history but to do business. What is the programme—what has to be done to-day?"

Mr. Gubbins immediately rose to the occasion, he put on the confidential agent's air, and explained the dangers, the necessities, and the advantages of the situation. He knew which voter was shaky and which could be depended upon; his dodges and resources were inexhaustible, his fertility of invention unbounded.

"Most valuable person, most valuable," whispered Mr. Highview to Dick; "is as familiar with the voters as a musician with the keys of his instrument. I assure you he will pull you through if any man can. Your friend there is a charming fellow, but a bit of a visionary; no use being visionary, great thing is to be practical. That's where Lady Eleanor excels; wonderful practical woman, far-reaching views, an unfailing instinct, almost second-sight, I call it! She picked you out at once as a promising candidate."

"I am afraid she has lost her faith in me," said Dick, stealing a look at Bruce and the agent who were mutually buttonholing one

another in the corner. "I do not expect she takes much interest in my success or failure now."

"You are mistaken, nothing pleases Lady Eleanor like success. If you become our member, I myself will take you to her triumphantly. I can promise you a favourable reception and my niece's hand as well. That's worth working for, eh? Luce is very much attached to you, very much; a quiet girl, but a good girl, though I say it, eh?"

"You are too kind." Dick flushed. The thought of Lady Fenchurch started to his memory and poisoned the pleasure good Mr. Highview's encouragement would have afforded him. What did it matter if Luce were good and loving? she could be nothing more to him now. He was bound in honour to stand by Lady Fenchurch, to shelter and protect her in the unhappy position to which his own folly and her vanity had led her. He passed his hand across his brow. Mr. Highview saw the action and attributed it to weariness and discouragement. "I believe you will be member yet. I really do," he said. "The Conservatives

have not a chance just now. Sir Hilary has done himself harm by his vindictiveness; there is moderation in all things, and to take out warrants against gentlemen is positively unpardonable. Lady Eleanor thinks so too; she is far more amiably inclined towards you now than I had ever hoped; she has a fine judgment, a very fine judgment, and she is really partial to you is my lady. It all depends upon you now, my boy. You must pull yourself together and show energy."

"Yes, I will do my best," said Dick, preparing to follow the agent and Bruce who were already half way down stairs.

CHAPTER XIII.

“WELL?” said Mrs. Vincent, the same day, interrogatively to her husband, when in muddy riding-boots and splashed coat he entered the room.

“Well! I’ve been in the town and heard the last news. I believe Dick has as good a chance as ever.”

“Impossible!” Mrs. Vincent laid down her work and looked meditatively at Dolly and Eliza’s brown heads, whispering and nodding together, as usual, in a corner.

“Leave the room, my dears, and go and see if Granny wants anything.”

Dolly and Eliza departed, obediently, to grumble together, outside the door, at the hardship of being prevented from hearing an interesting conversation between their elders.

“Is it about an elopement, do you think?” said Dolly, who was inclined to be romantic.

“I caught the word ‘disgraceful love affair’ yesterday between papa and mamma.”

“It is more likely to be something about money,” answered Eliza, who was of a practical turn of mind; “perhaps we shall not get any new frocks.”

“Love has nothing to do with money,” persisted Dolly; “I know I am right about the love affair.”

“It’s ‘much ado about nothing,’ then,” said Eliza, contemptuously, “I’ll be bound, mamma always makes mysteries about trifles. It’s just like the fuss she gets into when we read novels without asking. Why Mary Jones at the Rectory lends me all Ouida’s and Miss Broughton’s books, and mamma is none the wiser if I read them in bed and keep them under my pillow.”

“You always were sly,” retorted Dolly. “Come along now or mamma will pounce out upon us. Perhaps Granny will give us something if we ask her.”

“You’re a regular sponge,” said her sister, “always trying to see how much you can get, and yet your frocks are invariably

stained before mine, and you are never fit to be seen."

"Hush now," said Dolly, drawing her away.

Granny still spent most of her time in her bed-room; she had never recovered the shock caused by Mrs. Vincent's rudely blabbing out the story of the warrant and by Dick's departure. The slender thread of life had been sorely jarred and still quivered and vibrated painfully. Granny did not suffer except from weakness; her serene temperament reasserted itself, her calm mind remained clear as ever, but the old lady's constitution had received a blow from which it might never rally. She needed the most tender and delicate handling, and Mrs. Vincent's treatment, though doubtless correct and moral, was somewhat drastic. She scolded Granny if she cried, she exhorted her when she was sad and silent, she reproved her for sighing, and ordered her to sit still and inactive for fear of over-fatigue, when on the contrary moderate and interesting occupation would have distracted her thoughts and assisted her recovery. Granny left her bed, but she was too weak to care to drive

or walk, and she spent the greater part of her time in an armchair reading or working. Dolly and Eliza usually sat beside her. Their constant companionship proved a little wearisome to the old lady who was accustomed to solitude for many hours in the day, but the fear of appearing ungracious, and her exquisite tact, enabled her to endure the young ladies' society with a smile. Luce had been over to see her again, but under Lady Eleanor's escort, which considerably detracted from the pleasure of her visit, and she and Granny had been permitted only the shortest of *tête-à-têtes*. However in this brief space Luce found an opportunity to deliver Dick's message, his expression of contrition for the past and promise of good behaviour for the future.

"Dear fellow," said Granny, wiping her eyes; "I knew his heart was good. If he has done any thing wrong, Luce, it was rather from want of thought than heartlessness. Mrs. Vincent will not give him credit for anything, but I am sure her sons have faults too."

"We must have patience," said Luce, caressingly.

“ Yes, my dear, but you forget I am old ; if I should not live to see him righted —— ”

“ Do not think about that,” said Luce, kissing her again. “ Have faith in the future.”

And the old lady tried to cultivate faith, though she was sorely exercised by the condition of things in the household at Long Leam.

As soon as Dolly and Eliza had closed the door Mrs. Vincent began again.

“ Surely the people will not be so mad as to elect a man who has committed a felony.”

“ They do not believe it,” said uncle Vincent, gloomily ; “ sometimes I myself think it is a mistake ; Dick always was a gentleman I wish I had not yielded to your advice and taken part against him. I believe it was wrong, Maria.”

“ Tut, tut ! ” Mrs. Vincent’s pale face flushed and she pressed her thin lips tightly together. She was playing a dangerous game and a difficult game, but it was in a good cause. Mrs. Vincent comforted herself with the thought that she was an irreproachable wife, and a devoted mother. All that she did was for the children’s sake, her very

faults became good qualities when viewed in the pleasing light of maternal love.

But her husband's weakness and vacillation irritated her. If people worked for their families, as they were bound to do, silly scruples must stand aside, obstacles that hindered success must be brushed away. Dick was an obstacle, and, if he suffered in the process, his feelings and interests were of no importance compared with the object she had in view. Great conquerors regarded humanity in the mass ; individuals probably endured hardships and injustice, but the aggregate sum of good must alone be considered in the result. Mrs. Vincent looked upon herself in the light of a great conqueror; she laid her plans carefully ; she marched relentlessly on where she had decided, and crushed the opposition that dared to rear its head. A singular chance had toppled over Dick's position ; she had not sought it, nor intrigued for it, but when the opportunity presented itself, she seized it greedily. Mrs. Vincent was a great stickler for duty ; her duty towards her children occupied a large share of her thoughts, and she was inflexible in its pursuit. To this end she lost no

occasion of impressing Granny with her convictions, keeping well before her the iniquity of bequeathing property to a young man who was a spendthrift and a gambler on the turf, and stood in imminent danger of becoming a convicted felon. She knew Mrs. Carrol's fears and her carefulness lest she should not make proper use of the gifts conferred upon her husband, and of the uncontrolled responsibility with which he had invested her. She traded upon this holy feeling, and talked, as she well knew how, of duty and self-sacrifice, until poor Granny sometimes put her hands to her aching head and cried out in despair. But she could not so easily manage her husband. Though unscrupulous and devoid of moral feeling, he had all a man's natural contempt for crooked ways; he did not object to ruining Dick, but he would have preferred to fight openly. Though he blustered and swore, moreover, he was a coward at heart, and his wife knew it and took advantage of her knowledge. It was cowardice that prompted him to deny all knowledge of the cheque Dick had cashed at his own request. He accused no one, he simply kept silence, which served the purpose

amply. He feared to confess to his wife his folly in buying a racehorse that had broken down ; he cherished the letter in which Dick had talked of the purchase, and believed there was no one to prove that Vincent had ever owned it. All transactions had passed in Dick's name, and his uncle flattered himself he had thus procured immunity in case of disaster. But his conscience, rather a composite mixture of fear and cunning than any real moral coercion, left him little peace. He wondered that Dick had not attacked and defied him more openly. He expected every day that the blow would come, and that, spite of all the fine words and excuses with which he armed himself, he would be exposed and undone. He was afraid of his wife, a far cooler and subtler plotter than himself ; he was afraid of Dick, for whom he entertained a sneaking partiality and sporting comradeship, but he was honest to neither. Of the two, he preferred to throw in his lot with Mrs. Vincent, who would profit him most, and was most difficult to deal with. As he talked to her now, warming himself in front of the fire, with the kind of feeling that ease gave him security, and looked at

her cold hard face, her determined eye, and the strong bony hands—which never for an instant ceased from their busy plying of the needle in some household work, at which she was an adept and found it her pleasure to excel—he thought her a woman not to be tampered with. Breathing a sigh, he gave up Dick to his fate, even while he remembered the sunny insouciant nature of the young man, and the kindness and good-nature he had always shown him.

“If only the warrant had been served!” said Mrs. Vincent, regretfully. “Sir Hilary’s supineness is unpardonable. You ought to stir him up; but you are never any use except with horses.”

Uncle Vincent did not answer. He was conscious of having made a muddle of the very business in which his wife gave him credit for successful management.

“Have you seen Sir Hilary?” she asked again, knitting her brows. “Isn’t he jealous? What’s the matter with the creature? Did you tell him all the gossip there was about his wife and Dick? If he can pass that over he, is less of a man even than I thought.”

“I said what I could ; I hinted at imprudences,”

“Hinted !” said his wife, contemptuously ; “plain speaking alone is of use. A woman would not have made such a hash of it. If Dick gets into Parliament our chance is lost. Always strike while the iron is hot, and when a man is down.”

“That is not what we learnt at Eton,” said Vincent with a smile ; “we should have called that mean conduct.”

“I am not referring to boys but to men and women. Do you realise that, unless Dick is disgraced, every farthing goes away to him ? he will marry Luce, who is fool enough to care for him to an extent which is positively indecent, and will not listen to a word against him. Your children will be beggars, but you never think of them ; you will have to give up your horses, drink beer instead of wine, and deny yourself even a little bet on the Derby winner. You have been extravagant, and the children’s expenses increase every day. A man must look all these things in the face, before, just for some Quixotic ideas he sacrifices such a chance as we have got now. Providence no doubt

willed the inheritance to go away from Dick, or he would not have been permitted to find himself in such a predicament."

"I wonder who *did* steal the necklace!" said uncle Vincent, reflectively.

"Dick of course, and Lady Fenchurch assisted him."

"I can scarcely think it of him."

"Can't you? I can," Mrs. Vincent sneered. "He was in difficulties, he told her, she was in love with him, it is all as plain as a pike-staff. If only one could induce Sir Hilary to take some step."

"He can scarcely accuse his own wife."

"Why not? I daresay she and Dick meet constantly. Why does he not watch her, or lay a trap for her? women of that sort deserve no mercy."

"They do meet," said Vincent, slowly, "for as I was riding past the fir plantation to-day I saw him come out, and I caught sight of a petticoat fluttering off in the opposite direction."

"You did!" Mrs. Vincent's eyes expressed pleased surprise. "You are more observant than I believed; there is your chance; you

must enlighten the poor man about his wife's conduct."

"No, no, Maria, I cannot do that," he said, shrinking away a little.

"Why not, pray? it is your duty. You are saving the honour of a good old name."

"I believe in the truth of the proverb, 'Let sleeping dogs lie.' I might burn my fingers."

"Nothing venture nothing have," retorted his wife. "How can you be so cowardly?"

"I am not cowardly, I am prudent."

"And your prudence will ruin your family."

"Women don't understand these things," said uncle Vincent impatiently; "there are certain words one can say, and others that no man in his senses ever utters. Why should I interfere between man and wife?"

"Think of the shame. Dick ruined, and Lady Fenchurch disgraced; the fast immoral hussy! it will serve her right; there can be no more marriage with Luce then, even *she* could not take another woman's leavings; we are triumphant—do you understand? A word to Sir Hilary would be our salvation—we should do what we please afterwards."

“But I shall not say it,” cried uncle Vincent, resolutely marching from the room.

Mrs. Vincent sat with head bent, and brow knitted, motionless. Her husband would not do this thing; she knew further entreaties to be useless. Consequently the task devolved upon her, and she was equal to it. She had no pity for the young creature whose life she intended to blight; she was troubled by no hesitation, no remorse; now or never the deed must be done, and no one could do it better than herself. Until Dick was disinherited she should know no peace, and a scandal coupled with disgrace and dishonour was the surest way to obtain the desired result. Against these things Mrs. Carrol's love and indulgence could not hold out; in the face of damning facts her keen rectitude would prevail, while Luce herself, from common motives of maidenly reserve, must needs withdraw from the contest. Mrs. Vincent rejoiced that the result was left in her hands; she could not quite trust her husband, but she could trust herself and be perfectly sure of not making a bungle. All day she resolved plans in her own mind, weighing the for and against in every aspect, modi-

fyng, selecting, or rejecting each suggestion as it presented itself. Presently she went up to Granny's room, addressed her in the kindest manner imaginable, and put innumerable inquiries to her about her health. She volunteered to read aloud, and made no objection to the book proffered, plodding on and on patiently in the clearest and most unfaltering of voices through the leading articles of *The Times*, and some chapters of Darwin's "Origin of Species," which in less happy moods she was wont to designate as ridiculous rubbish for women to employ their minds upon. Mrs. Carrol listened contentedly—while the girls sat and stared at their mother—and thought to herself that she had really done her daughter-in-law injustice. She was remarkably kind and obliging if one only understood how to take her.

Mrs. Vincent during these hours of extreme amiability was maturing her plans, and getting Mrs. Carrol more and more into her power. She never intended her to get beyond it now, never again to exercise the right of free-will or indulge in the pretty feminine weaknesses and kind actions which her daughter-in-law considered unnecessary.

“Wasting good money,” she would think to herself, angrily remembering all the extravagances Dick had been allowed. Mrs. Vincent considered herself an admirable woman. She had been complimented so often by her friends, and her superiority niggardly acknowledged even by her husband, that she had grown to believe herself immaculate in her armour of duty and virtue. To expose a wicked frivolous coquette, to prevent a fine ancestral place, a large property with all its vast responsibilities, from falling into the hands of a gambler and a *roué*, were, she thought, truly good and estimable actions; and, if the means she was forced to employ were not quite so straightforward and honourable as she might have wished, still that did not alter the fact that her conduct remained admirable and well-meaning. Certainly no time must be lost; they were within a day or two of the polling, and, that once concluded, the effect of her unmasked batteries would be entirely lost. Mrs. Vincent cogitated deeply. Should she herself call upon Sir Hilary? No, that would not do. He might refuse to listen to her, and he might suspect her of evil intentions

Should she send some one to him? No, it was dangerous to trust anybody. Should she write, if so in her own name? Then the cowardly weapon of anonymity presented itself temptingly; she would be safe, he would suspect nothing, he would be entirely in the dark, but he would read—the blow would fall surely and certainly, and then, perhaps, who could tell, he might come to her and she could help him with her wisdom. The same evening Sir Hilary received an anonymous letter informing him of his wife's infidelity, mentioning the interview in the fir-plantation, and begging him to challenge the truth of the assertion by inquiry. The letter concluded by assuring him that the writer was solely actuated by friendly motives, and induced to come forward from disgust at Lady Fenchurch's trickery, which had excited indignation in the breast of honest persons.

CHAPTER XIV.

LADY ELEANOR sat in the gorgeous library, with its fine painted ceiling, to which the carved oak panelling nearly reached. She occupied the very crimson plush divan under the large tree-palm, where Maud had posed in elegant languor on the evening of Dick's arrival. But there was no one to admire her now; she was alone in the house with the two girls, Luce and Maud. Mr. Highview was away assisting at the election. Luce's heart was heavy and anxious, and the solitude of the great house seemed unbearable to Lady Eleanor, who loved brightness and gaiety around her, and therefore prevailed on Maud not to leave her at this moment. Maud was not disinclined to stay; true she could conduct no matrimonial schemes under the circumstances, but she enjoyed plenty of

ease and comfort, and was spared her mother's reproaches and the presence of a spoilt brother, whose holiday time she abhorred and now fortunately escaped. A large bedroom was allotted her, looking out on the park, and here she spent much of her time. In another person's house, she threw her usual ideas of economy to the winds, burnt large fires in the grate from morning till night, lit as many candles as she chose, drank tea before she rose in the morning, and as she lay in the huge four-post bedstead, draped with a highly-coloured pattern of *crétonne*, meditated on the joys of being rich. Surely no one can ever appreciate riches like the poor, especially the genteel poor, whose whole life has been a struggle to keep up appearances, and whose heart has been eaten out of them by the shifts and efforts they have endured. Maud considered material luxury her highest ideal, and even the temporary enjoyment of it soothed and enchanted her. She was a little sybarite, no couch was too soft, no cushion too luxurious, no existence too idle and easy. She put forth all her efforts to charm and ensnare, but only with the after-thought that once

the goal reached she need never again exert herself. Thus, though her stay at Highview Castle was time wasted, yet, as it was time pleasantly wasted, she never grudged it. Lady Eleanor had not before found so congenial a companion, and the girl's visit seemed likely to be indefinitely prolonged. Her tastes, and those of Lady Eleanor, exactly coincided. Both loved grandeur and show, both estimated people more by their external than by their mental qualities; both were naturally selfish and cold, both preferred luxury to affection; but Maud, being young and dependent, cleverly hid her selfishness under a mask of obligingness, and her coldness under a show of devotion, thus duping Lady Eleanor till the latter conceived Maud to be nice and warm-hearted in an inverse ratio to Luce. Lady Eleanor never could forgive Luce for having taken the place of her own child; she could not forgive her for being plain, (though her jealousy might have been roused had she possessed beauty,) and she could not forgive her real love for and her fidelity to the losing cause personified by Dick.

“One owes something to one's family,”

she would say sternly, while Luce, pale and silent, did watercolour sketches at a table near. "A man who has once disgraced himself, and is shown to be deficient in the instincts of a gentleman, should never be tolerated in good society. When will you learn that 'noblesse oblige,' Luce?"

"Oh, aunt! I am nothing, only a poor little orphan girl that you took in out of charity. Why should I be proud?"

"You come of an unblemished family," said her aunt, "your mother was a Highview;" and Lady Eleanor stretched out her hand, that elegant white hand, covered with rubies and diamonds, to stroke Squib, who lay curled beside her on a blue velvet cushion.

"I wonder how the election will pass off," said Maud, with a yawn, laying down the last new novel she had been idly fingering. "Mr. Highview will not be back to-night, will he, Lady Eleanor?"

"No, my dear, and I shall be heartily glad when the whole thing is over. If I had known all the trouble it would entail, I would never have mixed myself up in the election—it is not worth the pains one takes. After all, I always go in to dinner before

any of these county people, and being in Parliament gives nobody much influence now-a-days. Before the ballot it was different. I doubt if the butcher even would be flattered by a duchess's kiss in these degenerate days."

"But, Lady Eleanor, you do not like to fail."

"No, I do not," candidly confessed Lady Eleanor (pray don't stoop so, Luce, it is very unladylike), "and that is one reason why this young man's unpardonable folly makes me doubly angry."

"Did you ever hear of any reason for Mr. Carrol's supposed conduct?" asked Maud, presently.

"None, except that he gambled and kept racehorses; but that is sufficient reason, surely."

"Perhaps Lady Fenchurch likes racing?"

"How, Lady Fenchurch!" Lady Eleanor half rose and looked angry. "My dear Maud, I think you are speaking of what you know nothing about."

"I beg your pardon; I thought it was no secret," Maud began to pinch Squib's ears. The little dog resented the treatment, and turned round with an angry squeak.

“Pray leave Squib alone,” said Lady Eleanor. “Here you darling, come to me.” she added coaxingly to the dog. Squib crawled slowly up the front of her ruby velvet gown, and condescended to settle himself on her lap in the most comfortable place he could find.

“Really, Maud, you must not worry dogs, or repeat gossip.”

“I won’t,” said Maud, looking round to see whether Luce heard. The latter was bending over her drawing, some of her hair had fallen forward and obscured her face; she did not speak. Maud could not be quite certain.

“Or, at least,” continued Lady Eleanor, with assumed indifference, “if you do repeat gossip you should take care to be correct. May I ask to what you refer?”

“Nothing, Lady Eleanor, nothing, I assure you; as you say, one must never gossip.”

“Of course any information you may think it necessary to give me does not come under the category of gossip, nor are questions you may ask which are useful for your enlightenment; therefore, speak on, child, without fear.”

“I have nothing to say;” Maud took a

hothouse rose from the china bowl near, and began to pick at the leaves, pulling them off one by one, and dropping them on the Turkey carpet. "I only wondered—one can't help wondering you know—why Lady Fenchurch told Mr. Carrol about her necklace; or why, having told him, and thereby thrown suspicion on him, she did not keep the information to herself. Do you think she can care for him still?"

"She is married," briefly answered Lady Eleanor.

"That is not always a reason. I wonder what *cid* pass between them. I am sure he was fond of her once," said Maud, thoughtfully.

Luce made an uneasy movement like that of a person who suffers, but did not uncloset her lips. Maud, who loved watching her as a cat does a mouse (she had not yet quite forgiven her for stealing away her cousin), continued in her clear innocent tones:

"You don't mind my saying these things do you, dear Luce? It is so much better that one should have a right conception of the truth. I always thought you a little in a hurry to accept Dick. He is a dear fellow,

but I should not have said his *forte* was fidelity. I think he runs after every pretty face, and he had scarcely time to love you *very* much, unless you believe in love at first sight. What is your opinion, Lady Eleanor?"

Every word stabbed Luce as Maud intended, stabbed even deeper than she knew, for Luce never forgot how Dick asked her to be his wife, nor that he told her loyally and truthfully of his previous attachment. She believed fully in his innocence; she could bear anything except to think that he had betrayed her, and gone back in heart to that other woman who had already spoilt his life.

"Don't you think these surmises waste of time?" she said, quietly; "as I am engaged to Dick, his past can have nothing to do with me. I am only mistress of his future."

"You are more forgiving than I am. I think his past has a great deal to do with you."

Luce was silent. These innuendos were of daily occurrence.

"Oh!" said Lady Eleanor, lightly, "Luce does not care what we think, she is very obstinate; but you may be sure of this, Luce, unless Mr. Carrol clears himself fully and

completely from all these accusations, you shall never marry him."

"He must get into Parliament too," said Maud, in a light mocking tone, "that will keep him steady. I am sure those long-winded debates and the late hours are enough to take the spirit out of any man."

"If Mr. Highview had stood himself, we should have been saved all anxiety," sighed Lady Eleanor.

"Yes, indeed," echoed Maud; "it is most unfortunate."

Luce began to put up her drawing things,—she was sick and weary at heart. This love had cost her much already, and she was not yet near the end. Was she justified in clinging to him in spite of everything? Supposing he were only fooling her, only making use of her affection as a cloak to veil his real feelings for Lady Fenchurch. But in that case why had he been honest? why did he tell her that all was past and over between him and Evelyn, and that he meant to lead a new life? No, no, she could not misjudge him thus. It was the woman's part to keep hope bright and pure, to cultivate patience and forbearance, to

love as she would be loved. Luce tried to calm her eager pulses, to still her anxious fears, to be strong with the strength of endurance and self-control. The weather, indeed, rather hindered cheerfulness. Luce, exquisitely sensitive to the changes of the atmosphere, suffered from the mild relaxing air, and the damp and dreariness that pervaded all things. The soaked laurels shone green and glossy, the sheep shivered in the wet grass and came out on to the road to find a dry spot on the gravel to lie down, the drenched birds flew low under the bushes, the little crocus-heads withered and mildewed as they reached the surface. Only the snails crawled about on the path, in sticky impassive enjoyment. The muggy touch of spring had come bereft of its brightness, the sun scarcely ever shone, and the skies remained grey and leaden. If the clouds cleared off for a little while and the rain ceased, Luce would mount her horse and gallop along the muddy lanes, snatching a brief excitement; the healthful exercise flushed her pale cheeks and gave a lustre to her eye, but at other times she crept quietly about the house like a timid mouse,

as her uncle said, pinching her cheek kindly. When the election was decided, then her fate would be decided too, she reflected.

The last public meeting had been a stormy one. Dick's supporters had scarcely been able to obtain a hearing; no one could tell the result, though every one hoped according to his convictions. And then if Dick failed—Luce's breath forsook her at the thought—if violent opposition set in against her marriage, she must either mortally offend her uncle and aunt, who had trained and sheltered her from babyhood, or leave Dick disappointed and lonely to mourn her loss. She lay awake at night thinking of these things. She had nothing to comfort her, not a line, not a message from Dick; she was not allowed to see him, and, indeed, now she had promised him fidelity she did not care any more to defy her aunt's prohibitions. She was utterly and entirely lonely, far more lonely than Dick, who had the excitement of effort. Her uncle might share her feelings and sympathise with her, but she knew he would never oppose her aunt in any great thing. Thus she had only herself to depend upon, and that shadowy Father

in Heaven whose presence she dimly felt surrounding her. A hush of expectation was upon her, a gathering-up of every nerve and muscle in preparation for the coming struggle. She could scarcely remain still; she wandered aimlessly about, neglecting her books, hating the splendour of her empty life, and the long dinners, with all the pomp of plate, and noiseless plush-breeched footmen, in which her aunt delighted. Had the master of the house himself lain at death's door, the dinner would have been as perfectly served; the well-oiled wheels of routine have preserved their onward course without a creak. Maud could lie in her big bed and count the bunches of red roses on the *crétonne* curtains, with indolent happiness, and think of the blessings of riches, and feel one true thrill of gratitude for what she was temporarily permitted to enjoy; but Luce only chafed and fretted. She thought of dear Granny and her patient old face, and the life fast drawing to its close, which had been all effort and disappointment, and of the old servant, with his years of grey-haired service, and the reward of dismissal which would be his when Mrs. Vincent came into

her kingdom ; she thought of Uncle Vincent and his coarse jolly heartiness, and ill-disguised envy of his nephew. She thought of the smooth lawns and the well-trimmed yew-hedges, and the quiet lake, and all the venerable lovely stateliness of the old place, which had seen generations of owners live, die, and disappear ; and still the smile of everlasting summer sunshine lit up the woods, and intensified the deep vivid colours of the flowers in the garden, and speckled the green grass alleys, always cool and fresh. The hurry and turmoil of life seemed to her even more foolish and mean when compared with the quiet and the majesty of the fine old house and grounds. Ah ! if only Dick could purge himself of the stain of tarnished honour thrown upon him, could succeed his grandmother in due course, and take up the string of her duties and responsibilities, as one who well understood them ; and if Luce—the child buried her face ; she dared not pursue her reverie further. She yearned so for the peaceful joys of home, for a deep and true affection, for the ample scope of all her faculties. She knew herself to be plain and simple and ordinary, not fitted for a unique

and brilliant position, not born to stand on giddy heights, and shine and dazzle admiring crowds, but just to do her duty quietly, unobtrusively, and earnestly. Ah! if Heaven would but be good to her, would but hear her prayers! Then Luce, roused to a sense of the present, heard her aunt's voice calling, and descended, soon to be apparently absorbed in winding silk, or giving Squib his tea out of a dainty pink china saucer. Lady Eleanor yawned a good deal.

“Once this election business over, I shall go abroad,” she said to Maud; “how any one can ever endure to spend the spring in England I can't think—with the east winds to dry one's skin and cut one's face, and the dust flying all day—at least in Italy one can sit in an orange-grove, in a still warm atmosphere, and hold up a white cotton parasol to keep off the sun.”

“And if you go, you will take me with you,” insinuated Maud. “Do—I shall be so useful, and I'm never sea-sick.”

Lady Eleanor smiled, and, utilising her adaptability, sent her upstairs to fetch a smelling-bottle.

CHAPTER XV.

SIR HILARY having determined to crush Dick, and to punish his wife for the interest she had shown Dick by forcing her to take a share in his vengeance, felt considerably relieved, and proceeded to cool down in exact proportion to the heat of his previous rage. He was a kind-hearted man, though narrow; he loved his wife in the cold selfish way many people have, seeing her faults, lenient to none of her weaknesses, and yet proud of her in a possessive fashion, because she was his property. He did not for an instant believe her to be more guilty than she confessed; his wife, it seemed to him, would not thus forget herself, and yet he treated her with greater harshness and brutality than a more loving man, agonized by fear and jealousy would have dared to

employ. He was too obtuse to see that such conduct was driving her from him, and likely to precipitate the very results he feared. He had no suspicion of sentiment, and would have laughed at the modern talk about sympathy. He felt that as his wife she was entitled to food and clothes, and every luxury, but by that very act of purchase was also his without hinderance or demur. It was her business to look pretty and charming and do him credit, because she was his wife, but it was also her duty to obey implicitly, and to think no one in the world worthy to be compared to him. After the first ebullition of anger he intended things to resume their normal aspect; he believed he had thoroughly frightened her, and never reckoned on the consequences of that fright. In his experience he had found women docile, gentle, and easily alarmed, and he scarcely anticipated the spirit of rebellion and resistance lying dormant in Evelyn. Kindness and confidence might have won her regard; suspicion and anger must certainly repel her. When, therefore, his wrath had subsided, and he began to speak in a natural tone to Evelyn, he was astonished that she,

remembering his bitterness, and feeling secure in the protection Dick had promised, answered him coldly and indifferently. It was on the very evening of the interview in the plantation; her ears were still ringing with the sound of Dick's voice, and her heart was still beating with emotion and dangerous excitement. Her husband's commonplace remarks stirred no responsive chord; he simply wearied her a little and disturbed her reverie. Miss Fenchurch, always at her knitting, glanced anxiously from one to the other. A faint sense of anger troubled her as she remarked Evelyn's indifference, her cold disconnected replies, and her evident disregard of the condescension Sir Hilary showed in forgetting the cause of his resentment. She would have liked to pinch her sister-in-law into some demonstrativeness, to warm her chilly tones, and put humility and gratitude into their distant dignity. After a while Sir Hilary subsided into the perusal of his paper, and Evelyn took up a novel. She was unstrung, she felt a distaste even for her piano, which usually proved a welcome resource in moments of vexation or *ennui*. Miss Fenchurch, whose whole life had been passed in

the quiet routine of provincial existence—rarely, indeed, had she stirred from home, and, when she did, she had been oppressed with a nervousness which rendered the return to her own fireside extremely welcome—failed to understand the unrest, the nervous impatience, the need of excitement, which pervades the minds of modern women. She looked and looked again at Evelyn, and noticed that the drawing-room was warm and comfortable, that the piano stood conveniently near, that on a table were vases of hothouse flowers, and books and papers, and everything a young woman could want, and she wondered still more at Evelyn's strange obstinacy and recklessness. To agree with one's husband was not only a duty but a positive pleasure; jars and wrangles disturbed the equanimity of the conjugal atmosphere, and provoked ill-will and loss of appetite. Her brother looked unwell, Evelyn's lips were pale, and her eyes shone with an unnatural febrile light. The state of things was very unwise, and very foolish. Miss Fenchurch determined to speak to her sister-in-law at once. Notwithstanding her aversion to meddling she must say a warning

word to a girl she had herself brought up, drilled in manners and deportment, and taught the Catechism and use of the globes. It must have been with something of the homely sparrow's feelings when it gazes upon the cuckoo it has hatched, that Miss Fenchurch observed the daring and insubordination of her brother's wife, noticed her flashing eyes when remonstrated with, her independence and self-assertion. It was unseemly, it was unladylike, but with a sigh she said to herself it was natural. With the flavour of board schools all around, and the rash wild boasts of scepticism filling the air, it was not to be wondered at, though intensely to be deplored.

When Evelyn wished her good-night and was about to imprint the careless kiss that regularly fell on the old maid's cheek, Miss Fenchurch seized her sister-in-law's hands with a studied kindliness, and drew her into the maidenly bed-room set out so primly with its old-fashioned mahogany furniture, its dimity coverings, and the little pile of good books placed on a corner of the table. "Come in, dear," she said, "for a minute and talk to me."

“You won’t keep me long, Rachel,” answered Evelyn, with a yawn, putting down her candlestick, in anticipation of a rambling discourse on the best recipe for plum-jam, or removing fruit-stains from linen, or on the qualities and peccadilloes of the village-children, “please, I’m very tired.”

Evelyn’s pretty flexible figure in the close fitting white cashmere dress, with the coils of raven-black hair, piled in gloomy masses round her well-shaped head, might have furnished a sculptor with a model, and raised the envy of many a London belle, but Miss Fenchurch had no eye for beauty in the strict sense of the term ; curves, outlines, and sinewy forms did not appeal to unexisting artistic sensibilities. She admired orthodox pictures, and hid her face coyly before undraped Greek statues, but Sir Joshua Reynolds was the extreme limit of her critical approbation, and even his ladies, though fine and well-bred, were, she considered, a little deficient in propriety, their draperies seemed so very free and unconventional ; and if by chance a pin had given way—Miss Fenchurch shuddered at the possible consequences.

Naturally, then, she saw only in Evelyn a healthy, well-grown young woman, whose will required control, and whose temper especially required to be curbed and brought under discipline.

“What is it, Rachel?” said Lady Fenchurch, with another yawn, settling herself more easily and gracefully when her sister-in-law paused; “do make haste, I am dying to go to bed.”

“You are remarkably tired to-night, I think,” said Miss Fenchurch, pursing her lips; “generally you are ready enough to sit up, playing airs from those silly comic operas.”

“Well, one changes. I suppose it isn’t a crime to be sleepy?”

“No, but it’s a grave fault in a woman to snub her husband.”

“Indeed! Well my husband snubs me. Is that a fault in your eyes?”

Miss Fenchurch coughed. The matter was more delicate than she had supposed. Evelyn spoke in a cold sarcastic tone; it might be difficult to touch her.

“You did not respond quite nicely to my

brother's kindness to-night," she said at last.

"Didn't I? Well, you see I never know if I'm a sinner or a saint; yesterday he stormed at me, to-day it is all sweet and sugary. I can't accommodate myself to this rapid change of tactics."

"Tactics between a husband and wife! There ought to be humility and gentleness on your part, and I am sure in that case I can promise that my brother will be grateful and kind."

"I don't think he has treated me at all fairly, and I certainly don't intend to be whistled back to his side like a retriever whenever he chooses. I have my pride, my dignity. It is not because Hilary was my guardian that I am necessarily his slave."

"Oh, my dear!" Miss Fenchurch gave a shudder of remonstrance.

"I mean what I say. I have no idea of being trodden down and ill-treated by my husband, or by anybody." Evelyn tapped her little slippered foot angrily against the floor.

"That kind of insubordination and re-

bellion in a woman is a terrible mistake, believe me," said Miss Fenchurch, sadly.

"What does all your submission lead to? Look at you, you dare not order a dish for dinner unless it is to your brother's particular taste; you never get a junket, or a real little bit of diversion, but just sit here from year's end to year's end, seeing your brother's friends, receiving their frumpy old wives, reading books you are told are *proper*, instead of pleasing yourself at your age; paying weekly bills without cessation, grumbling over a pennyworth of bread or a farthing's-worth of tallow-candles. Do you call that a life? I don't," Evelyn answered.

"Evelyn, your sentiments terrify me—so well brought up as you were too!"

"Of course, you taught me to read, and I have read to some purpose; you gave me a mirror, and I have learnt to dress and look well; you taught me the duties of marriage, and I have ascertained it has rights also."

"Are you speaking of the Married Woman's Property Act?" gasped Miss Fenchurch, aghast with stupefaction; "that does not apply to you."

"I know that," said Evelyn with concen-

trated bitterness, "because I have not a penny. I wish I had; *how* I wish I had!"

"Oh, child, go to your room, and say your prayers; you're very, very wicked, flying in the face of Providence and all his mercies."

"I told you I was sleepy, why did you rouse me?" Evelyn said with a subtle smile. Now that she was secure of Dick's devotion she rather enjoyed a war of wits with her sister-in-law, in which she knew she must have the advantage. She did not intend to make any real use of her lover, she did not even realise that she was foolishly risking her position, but she did appreciate the sense of power which his strong support afforded her. She was worldly enough to determine to keep her luxuries at any cost, but woman enough to play with edged tools, and like the danger, while she tried to solve the impossible problem of eating her cake and having it. Miss Fenchurch had never before in her experience met with a similar case, and was puzzled how to treat it. She determined to try persuasion. "Consider, my dear," she began, "it is to your own interest to be amiable."

"I daresay, but I am not a hypocrite,

and just now I don't feel inclined to be amiable."

"Religion teaches us that we are miserable sinners."

"Your religion perhaps. I am sure I am not a bit worse than my neighbours. I have never worried for a London house though of course I should like it, nor been at all extravagant, or done any of the things that many wives do to annoy their husbands."

"Because you are not worse than others, that does not make you better. You can have very little real right feeling if you pride yourself on not being as bad as some women."

"Is the homily over?" asked Evelyn, coldly; "we have not yet entered upon Lent and I'm horribly sleepy."

"Oh yes, go, go to bed and dream of forbidden pleasures; you are a wicked girl; I am sadly grieved and sadly disappointed in you," cried Miss Fenchurch, angrily.

Evelyn shrugged her shoulders. Her sister-in-law's lectures fell upon her ears like the sound of idle rushing waters; she thought the whole thing much ado about nothing. It was certainly very disagreeable when people

were so dreadfully old-fashioned and prudish. It robbed life of all amusement and distraction. She took up her candle-stick and moved forward to kiss her sister-in-law, but Miss Fenchurch jerked pettishly backwards and presented only an angular arm instead of a cheek for the salute. Evelyn shrugged her shoulders again, and without further comment departed. Miss Fenchurch remained standing by the table, feeling cross and confused. Vaguely she began to realise that her brother's marriage had been a mistake; that the difference in years created also a difference in feeling almost insurmountable; that unless some great effort were made, things must end badly; and that for once in his life, perhaps, her brother had not been so wise as he should. Miss Fenchurch proceeded to undress herself, slowly pondering on these things; slowly she unpinned her cap heavy with jingling bugles, slowly she wound up her thin front hair into the prim curl-papers, and hid her gaunt form in the folds of her flannel dressing-gown. She could scarcely remember the time when she had been young and giddy; young she must have been (allusions to her age even

now displeased her), but giddy—never. She had kept young men at a proper distance and preserved a maidenly decorum, which perhaps had driven them away. Miss Fenchurch recalled no proposal but one, that of a penniless young officer, who had been harshly reproved by her parents for daring rashly to offer himself. He was a handsome young fellow, and for one brief instant Miss Fenchurch thought she might have been happy with him, then sighing she resigned herself submissively to her parents' veto. Since then she had given no man the right to suppose she cast one thought towards him. Naturally the restless excitable modern temperament proved a puzzle and an annoyance to her. That girls should have a will of their own astonished her; that they should seek to impose that will upon their husbands terrified and bewildered her.

CHAPTER XVI.

SIR HILARY was on the point of starting to hunt. He was whistling loudly to himself as he pulled on his boots and tied the pipe-clayed strings into the neatest of little bows. He was rather a dandy in the hunting-field; and, though an elderly man, rode good horses, and showed well to the front in a run. Perhaps the only thing in the world he really loved was sport; and, on hunting occasions, his good humour was invariably unruffled. Even long dragging days, when the scent was bad, and the pace slow, and the weather cold and drizzling—days which sent others, less keen, home disgusted, never wearied him. He declared that it rejoiced his heart to watch the hounds hunt, and that a quick thing as a rule was no better than a steeplechase.

Now, therefore, when preparing to make an early start, he was the essence of good humour, and whistled "For a hunting we will go" unconcernedly, without regard to time and tune. While thus engaged the post-bag was handed to him, whence he extracted Mrs. Vincent's anonymous letter. He read it twice over before he seemed to understand its purport, then he dropped the boothook, he still held, heavily on the floor, spread the letter out flat before him on the table, and exclaimed loudly "Deuce take it!"

The ingeniously worded letter left behind it a terribly bitter sting, and the annoyance, coming as it did just when he was in the happiest temper imaginable, seemed doubly crushing. *His* wife the talk of the county; *his* wife holding clandestine meetings with her lover; *his* wife deceiving him like the vulgar spouse of a shopkeeper.

Then the story of the necklace rose to his mind and assumed an utterly disproportionate importance. There was no doubt left him that the necklace had been taken by Dick, not *stolen*, for Sir Hilary's wife had given it him. To prosecute Dick was to implicate Evelyn, to punish him was to

ruin her. Sir Hilary ground his teeth in impotent rage. The sweet smiling hypocrite! The cunning wretch! How she had fooled him with kind words. He should never, never pardon her, of course, but he would allow no scandal, would give nobody the right to jeer and scoff at him. He would be convinced of the truth first; the letter might be a lie; he would confront his wife with it. In her face he could easily read the truth or falsehood of the accusation. Hastily pulling on his boot he hurried in his smart pink clothes, the emblem of his quest of careless pleasure, to his wife's room. She had risen late and was not yet dressed. Her glossy hair hung in beautiful waves down her back, and streamed over the pale yellow dressing-gown she wore. As he entered she turned towards him with a smile. She had slept well and forgotten her peevishness of the previous night. Whatever else might happen she hated to be dull or bored; life was very pleasant to her, and she endeavoured to extract as much joy from it as was possible, consistent with ease and indolence. She had never looked prettier, her rosy lips were parted with a smile, her eyes bright with repose, the negligence of

her toilet enhanced her charms. Even Sir Hilary in the midst of his anger felt this; he stopped for an instant on the threshold looking at the lovely picture. The neat French maid, who was brushing her mistress's hair, paused with the brush in her hand.

"What is it, Hilary?" said Evelyn, carelessly gathering up her rings as she spoke.

"I ——Marie, you can leave us alone."

Both mistress and maid looked surprised.

"Certainly, sir," said the maid, laying down the brush with an air of disdain, and slowly quitting the room.

Evelyn turned round a little and faced her husband as he strode forward; his face working with stern passion, alarmed her. He came close up to her, put his hand on her bare arm, dazzlingly white under the loose yellow sleeve, and said in a tone that he endeavoured to make sternly judicial, but which was really only bitterly cold and hard:

"Have you met Carrol since the affair of the necklace? And were you with him in the fir plantation the day before yesterday?"

Evelyn, now thoroughly frightened, stammered and blushed. There was an instant's

silence, then he dropped her hand with a jerk.

“Don’t speak,” he said, “don’t tell me; I know it is true.”

He fell back a pace or two, and turned so deadly white that Evelyn, fearing some mishap, sprang to his assistance.

“No, no, leave me, it is nothing,” he said, waving her aside. Then steadying himself with some difficulty, he walked from the room, leaving Evelyn speechless with astonishment and surprise. It was some moments before she recovered her composure sufficiently to understand that he had left her under a false impression, and that, in the state of rage he was in, dire might be the consequences unless she could appease him. When she thought of these things and tried to look them boldly in the face she at once started, as she was, in her loose robe, with her hair flying, to search for him. But he was not in his dressing-room, and she dared not face the servants down stairs. She therefore determined to return to her own apartment, and ring for her maid, whom she despatched at once in haste with the strictest orders not to return without Sir Hilary,

whom she desired to speak with at once. The time seemed interminable before the maid returned from her fruitless errand, announcing that Sir Hilary had already mounted his horse and gone out. Mounted his horse!—surely in the state he was in, he would never have contemplated hunting; yet, if not, why had he ridden off so suddenly in his scarlet coat and topboots? Evelyn could only suppose that she had exaggerated the danger, and that he was not really so angry as she had believed. She sat quietly thinking and wondering how long this unpleasant state of things would last, while Marie finished arranging her hair. Presently the maid hazarded a remark, “Monsieur seems strange this morning.”

“Why?” calmly replied Evelyn.

“He never send me out of the room other days, and he looked cross, oh, very cross.”

“He is worried with the election.”

“Perhaps; but, if Madame will pardon me, I think she should take care for Monsieur, he is ill, he not look himself, his eyes are wild and strange; Madame pardons me?”

“Sir Hilary looks strange, you say?” repeated Evelyn, slowly.

“Very strange, my lady, just so my poor brother-in-law looked before he tried to murder his wife, and we had to shut him up in the ‘asile des fous.’ ”

“Murder! What do you mean? Why do you speak of such dreadful things?”

“I did not wish to alarm my lady,” said the subtle Marie, deftly twisting up her mistress’s long hair, “but sometimes one must humour gentlemen when they look strange.”

“Yes, yes,” impatiently replied Evelyn, wondering what the maid knew, and whether there really was any likelihood of the danger at which she hinted. Slight mental aberration, restlessness, excitability—certainly here was a satisfactory reason for all that had alarmed her. Judicious treatment, careful diet, would no doubt soon restore the mental equilibrium so strangely shaken. Meanwhile she must try not to alarm herself.

On leaving Oakdene Sir Hilary galloped quickly along the road to West Thorpe. He met one or two sportsmen proceeding to the meet, who nodded and waved their hands to him, and seemed much surprised at his hasty progress, although attired in pink, in the op-

posite direction, but he pursued his way without regard to their wondering looks until he pulled up at the lawyer's house. The little garden on each side of the paved walk was bright with spring flowers, and the page came out to meet him, rosy from his midday lunch, but disappointed to observe a tall black horse instead of his friend the yellow cob.

Sir Hilary pushed past him, scarcely waiting to hear that the lawyer was at home, and the page eyed the horse meditatively, doubting whether it would do to tickle him under the stomach, or whether in the event of his resenting these familiarities, unpleasant consequences might not ensue. "Come along, my beauty," he said, seizing the bridle after due reflection, "come along, and let's make friends."

Sir Hilary was promptly admitted into the room where the lawyer sat writing, with the calm indifference of a man who lives on the consequences of others' wrongdoing, but who takes very good care not to indulge in any follies on his own account.

He greeted Sir Hilary as quietly and cordially as though there were nothing re-

markable in calling to consult one's lawyer, dressed in the most perfect of hunting habiliments, at an hour when every good sportsman was hurrying to the covert side.

"Anything new about the election?" he asked, motioning Sir Hilary to a seat.

"Nothing. I ——"

"I'm told we're safe to have a majority."

"Dewsnap, I've bad news!" Sir Hilary's throat felt parched, he could scarcely speak.

"Bad news, I'm sorry to hear it. Wait a moment; take a glass of wine after your hot ride. It's a relaxing, muggy day." Dewsnap rose and pulled out his keys.

"I don't mind if I do take a drop of something. I'm absurdly shaky this morning."

"Ah, well! canvassing is hard work, and all that speechifying is exciting. You're bitten with it, I expect."

"No—but I don't wish that scoundrel to succeed—I tell you he shan't, mind, if I can help it."

"That was a queer business about the necklace, wasn't it? It puzzled me rather—the motive I mean," said the lawyer, carefully pouring out the wine. "Such a mad thing

on the part of the young fellow, he was certain to be found out; however, when men are in want of money it is extraordinary what follies they will commit, and never think of the consequences. There's some wild blood about those Carrols, I expect; look at Vincent Carrol now, for instance, with that red face of his and love of low company—you would scarcely take him for a gentleman. However, I suppose even *he* would draw the line at stealing."

"He mustn't be prosecuted, Dewsnap."

"Why not? he richly deserves it. A man's being of a good family makes crime worse, and, in my opinion, there is no reason for letting him off easily."

"My wife ——" Sir Hilary changed colour and gasped so strangely that the lawyer grew uneasy.

"Your wife has interceded for him—that is very kind and pretty of her. I suppose she thinks you will give her another necklace directly, to compensate her; women don't regard honour as men do. They think a lover's infidelity worse than a bit of dishonesty."

Sir Hilary gasped again, and at last forced

out the words:—"It will compromise my wife."

"Compromise your wife! stuff, my dear fellow! I never knew you so scrupulous before. To gloss the matter over would compromise your wife infinitely more. I can understand your reluctance to prosecute, but, after all, it is the firm who prosecute, and they naturally do it in their own interests, and as a duty to the public."

"He did not steal the necklace."

"Not steal it—pray who did then?"

"My wife gave it to him."

"The deuce she did!"

The lawyer paused. This was an entirely new aspect of the case, and he did not see his way as clearly as he could wish to helping his old friend out of the dilemma.

"She told you?"

"No, but I found it out by an anonymous letter. First she met him clandestinely, then ——"

"You surely don't believe anonymous letters?"

"She confessed it, and says she told him about taking the necklace to the jewellers, and, to my mind, it's as clear as daylight."

"Ah, you think so then?"

“What do you mean to do?” asked Dewsnap, after a pause, turning over his papers to avoid looking at Sir Hilary.

“Do? First of all change my will, and then hold my tongue; I won’t have a scandal; I won’t be made a laughing-stock, I—she was so handsome, Dewsnap, and I thought her true as steel.”

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. Such mishaps were too common in his experience to cause him surprise or emotion, but he was anxious to spare his old friend pain and trouble, and sincerely desirous, as far as possible, to avoid publicity.

“If you think this, you are right to stop proceedings. Of course Cherry and Appleton will conform to your wishes; the loss is yours, not theirs, there will be no difficulty, I imagine; but Lady Fenchurch?”

“Don’t speak of her, don’t mention her name, she is a miserable creature.”

“You must not say that, if you do not wish for a scandal.”

“No, to be sure. Ah, Dewsnap, you were right, I was a fool to marry.”

“A fool to take a young wife, yes, that’s true.”

“I thought as she was so young, she would be yielding and amenable to reason.”

“Precisely; men of your age always think that, and find out their mistake when it’s too late.”

“Too late? do you think she hates me?”

“Pooh, nonsense, she knows which side her bread is buttered. Besides, you are making a vast deal too much out of all this business. I suspect she has been more foolish and silly than anything else, taken by a young man’s good looks and a parcel of fine compliments.”

“I am sure she had all she wanted. Why that necklace itself cost me a pretty penny.”

“I must say she did not behave well. The mistake is, ever to expect women to behave well, especially if you load them with presents; there are some favours so great they can only be requited by colossal ingratitude; however, in this case, I sincerely believe your wife has only been foolish. I should advise you to go home, give her a kiss, and say no more about it. Depend upon it by this time she is already heartily ashamed of herself.”

“I shall alter my will – put in a codicil; I

left her residuary legatee, and far too large a jointure ; that must be all changed now."

"Master Dick must be dealt with too, leave me to manage him, I'll put the screw on him, and, don't change your will."

"Thank you, I am quite determined."

"You don't seem satisfied ; have you anything more to tell me ?"

"I'm extremely obliged for your advice, but——"

"But you don't mean to take it. You needn't beat about the bush. I am quite accustomed to such inconsistencies."

"With your knowledge of human nature, can *you* believe in your wife ?"

"Of course I can ; she is plain and a good mother, and in our class of life we don't want or expect quite so much amusement as in your fashionable society."

"Fashionable indeed !" Sir Hilary groaned.

"I repeat again, go home and make it up. You're attached to your wife, and it is to her interest to keep well with you. Besides, there is Miss Fenchurch, surely she can play the dragon a bit on your behalf, and make your mind easy."

“My sister, good soul, doesn’t understand this kind of thing.”

“Well, she ought to know how to look after a young creature, drive with her, talk to her, engage her confidence.”

“Ah, my dear fellow, it was all a mistake ; we are both of us too old to cope with her fancies ; I see it now.”

“No mistake is irrevocable ; change your tactics, that’s all.”

“I mean to send for your clerk at once and have a codicil drawn up.”

“To be sure women are aggravating, but don’t be in a hurry, wait a little,” urged the lawyer.

“I have waited already too long. The election will be over almost immediately, and what then ? I shall be either an M.P., or rejected ; that will not cure my wife of her infatuation.”

“Wait and see. If Dick beats you she will be annoyed, women always like to be first ; if you beat him she will have enough to do thinking of your success. Besides, I believe you will win the contest.”

“I wish I was as sanguine as you are. Where is that clerk ? he is a long time coming.”

“Well, if you are determined—I have nothing more to say.” Dewsnap rang the bell and gave some orders.

“At any rate you will agree with me that there is no possible advantage to be gained by crying over spilt milk,” said the lawyer.

“None whatever—but I’m so confoundedly upset—just to show you, I have missed a favourite meet—Ashton spinney, you know what that is? and galloped Fireking along that macadamised road here, as if he were a hack—without any regard for his legs, when he cost me 200 guineas.”

“Foolish, certainly.”

“My head feels all queer—I’m in a fever.”

“Very likely you are, you’ve worked yourself into one. Now go home; take my advice, go home; take a refreshing draught, and speak nicely and sensibly to your wife—a smile from her will cool you better than anything—and be seen driving together this afternoon—don’t let the world begin to gossip. It’s death to a young woman’s reputation.”

“She has risked that pretty well herself already,” said Sir Hilary, gloomily.

“Stuff! No one knows anything. Just

keep your own counsel, and authorise me to call on Cherry and Appleton and stop proceedings at once. I'll go up there directly, if you like."

"You are very kind. I'll leave myself in your hands, I am sure you will act wisely, but I doubt if things will turn out as simple and easy as you suppose."

Sir Hilary could not be induced to alter his mind, the needful formalities were gone through, and the codicil having been drawn up, he rode home more soberly than he had come. Arrived at Oakdene he went at once to the library to speak to his wife, according to the lawyer's advice.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was with mixed feelings that Sir Hilary entered his wife's sitting-room, and it was with considerable annoyance that he found it empty. During his solitary ride home, at the conclusion of his interview with the lawyer, he had been preaching to himself patience and forbearance, he had been repeating inwardly the arguments Dewsnap had used, that Lady Fenchurch was only foolish, that she had been misjudged, that it was not likely she meant any harm, and that if she did it was wiser to ignore the inevitable, and to patch up the rent caused in their married life. All this Sir Hilary said to himself, and enforced it by the most cogent arguments he could think of, and yet he seemed to feel a kind of savage satisfaction in remembering the alteration in his will and

in picturing her discomfiture when she made the discovery. Sir Hilary had been a bachelor too long not to be deeply sensible of his rights and tenacious of his liberty; he could not reconcile himself to the idea that after conferring such benefits as his name and his fortune upon a penniless orphan, she should reward him by mockery and disdain. He had been accustomed to rule his household, his meek sister, and his obsequious servants, with a frown or a word, and he had no idea that any one would defy him. His temper was hot and angry, and the apparent courtesy of his manner, purely an affair of education, reached no further than the exterior. That his wife was not in her *boudoir* was natural enough. She had written a few notes, practised her piano for an hour, and was now, taking advantage of the fine sunshiny weather, gone for a stroll before luncheon. The traces of her presence were everywhere around the room; the *Morning Post* all crumpled as she had thrown it down after reading the fashionable intelligence, the music littered over the piano, the blotting-book in disorder, note-paper strewn upon the table, here a pocket-handkerchief dropped

in a hurry, there the pug's basket with the marks still visible of the warm pressure left by the little animal when he jumped out to follow his mistress.

Sir Hilary picked up the pocket-handkerchief and held it a moment before his face. How sweet it was, saturated with some delicious odour, an odour he recognised as a favourite of his wife's. What a pity he had lost faith in her, what a pity! He fidgeted backwards and forwards, sat in her chair, and moved the papers on the table; no signs of wrongdoing were there; his own photograph stood on one side of the silver inkstand, Miss Fenchurch's on the other. Everything bespoke the happy luxury of a peaceful well-ordered home. He had been kind to her, he thought no one could deny that; the furniture of her boudoir was new and bright and tasteful, she had pleased her own fancy in the silks and laces, the upholsterer he sent for from London had executed her wishes, and sent him in consequence a heavy bill. Sir Hilary paid it without a murmur; that was the way he understood the word affection, The room was gimcrack and feminine enough in all conscience to please the most fastidious

woman ; he gave a vicious kick to the lace draperies of a little table on which stood Dresden china cups filled with violets ; the lace tore with a sharp crack, and the cups rattled in their saucers. He stooped and with his clumsy fingers sought to repair the rent, but his spurs caught again in the lace and made the damage worse. He swore under his breath, and when he had extricated himself from the yards of lace and muslin that clung round his legs, returned to the arm-chair. There was no doubt he had been a fool, an egregious fool, to marry as he did. A still greater fool to complain of the non-success of his experiment. How could any one help him ? No doubt by this time Dewsnap himself was chuckling over the misadventure. That was the worst of such things—people laughed at, instead of pitying the unfortunate victim of deluded hopes. Yet was it true ? Why could he never help suspecting his wife, notwithstanding her repeated asseverations of innocence ? Why did he always lose his temper whenever the matter was mentioned, and, by his violence, drive her still further from him ? The lawyer was right, yet he felt somehow as if the advice were im-

possible to follow. His head ached, and his face looked flushed; when he caught sight of it in the glass it looked almost as red as the coat he wore. Then he remembered that in his rage and preoccupation he had forgotten to breakfast. It was nearly luncheon-time, and he had tasted nothing but the fine old sherry in the lawyer's office. Sherry was not a good substitute for breakfast, and that sherry, fine as it was, was very strong. Where could she be? why did she keep him waiting in this unseemly fashion? Was it possible that she had again gone out to meet her lover? At this thought he clenched his hands, and the blood seemed to fly to his head, and surge in dizzy waves in his ears. His vision became obscured. The gilt looking-glass over the mantelpiece danced before his eyes. He had never felt like this before, never, except when he had that bad fall out hunting, over a stone wall, and his horse caught his knees against the sharp coping and turned over heavily into the lane below. He saw stars then, myriads of stars, twinkling in impenetrable darkness. He jumped up, rubbing his eyes angrily. Since he had taken to caring about a woman

and her ways, everything unpleasant seemed to have happened to him. No woman was worth half as much as a good day's sport, then why did he distress himself, why fidget and suspect and wonder? He should make himself ill. Dewsnap told him he looked ill; men never observed each other's appearance except when they looked *very* ill. He must look very ill then. He raised himself heavily and peered into the glass. Bloodshot eyes and a purple face met his gaze; people might fancy he had been drinking, and yet a more sober, temperate, man never existed—it was all the fault of women, curse them! Then presently his legs seemed to glide from under him; his muscles relaxed, his eyes closed, and he fell back a helpless inert mass.

A few minutes later, Evelyn, her cheeks fresh and glowing, and her hands full of violets, entered the room, humming an operatic air. The little pug ran on in front of her and stopped with a sniff opposite the chair by which lay Sir Hilary. He gave a little short bark of alarm, then sniffed again and ran back to his mistress, as if to call her attention. Evelyn, who had laid the violets on the piano, and begun to tie them up into

little bunches, was some time before she observed the dog's manœuvres; when she did, she gave one piercing shriek and flew to the bell. The servants quickly caught the alarm, and the butler, footman, housemaid, and Miss Fenchurch presently appeared. Evelyn, overcome by the dreadful sight—for Sir Hilary, speechless, with closed eyes and purple face, groaned stertorously) fainted away; and the servants were divided between their concern for their master, whose case appeared terrible and hopeless, and their anxiety for their mistress, whose condition it seemed possible to treat with the old-fashioned remedy of burnt feathers and salvolatile.

Maids have a profound belief in salvolatile, and Marie was promptly summoned, bearing the contents of her mistress's dressing-case. It was in such emergencies that Miss Fenchurch's calm common sense, and well-trained silent movements, showed to advantage. In a remarkably short time she had had her brother carried upstairs, undressed and placed on his bed, sent one of the grooms for the doctor, opened the windows and restored Evelyn to consciousness; and when the medical man arrived he found Miss Fen-

church in cap and apron by the sick man's bedside, attended by a silent deft-handed housemaid, ready to act as her satellite. The doctor examined his patient, and shook his head.

"A fit," he said, turning to Miss Fenchurch, "and determination of gout to the head. May recover, but will never be the same man again—too fond of port wine, I expect, and he must have received a severe mental shock into the bargain. Ah! these hearty healthy men are always the worst patients, so strong, and so foolhardy; he was getting corpulent, too, and the gout hereditary—a bad business!"

"You do not anticipate any danger?" said Miss Fenchurch, calmly.

"Not immediate, but he must be kept very quiet: all depends on that ——"

"To-morrow is the polling day."

"No question of it—mustn't think of such a thing—he would never be fit for Parliament even if he were returned."

"My poor brother!" Miss Fenchurch wiped away a silent tear.

"Well, I don't expect he will feel the disappointment; very doubtful if he ever regains consciousness. The servant spoke

of two patients—where is the other? I can do no more here.”

“It is his wife, Lady Fenchurch.”

“Poor young thing! a terrible blow for her; they had not been married long, and the old men, you know—they’re all the same—wonderfully attached”—the doctor was a young man and unmarried. He had only just bought the West Thorpe practice, was imbued with all the latest scientific crotchets, and thought love and matrimony an unpardonable weakness. “Where is Lady Fenchurch? I had better see her at once; suffering from shock to the nerves, I suppose—a subject for bromide.”

Miss Fenchurch did not answer, but waved to her satellite to conduct the doctor.

He found Evelyn lying on a sofa, her hair dishevelled and hanging about her shoulders, her cheeks pale, and lips trembling. She looked very pretty in her grief and distress, and the doctor, notwithstanding his aversion to matrimony, felt considerable more sympathy for the young woman, who would in all probability marry again and be as cheerful as ever, than for the quiet and self-controlled sister, who, in losing her brother, lost

her only love and the last relic of happiness in her lonely life. Such is the world. Spite of our endeavours, the very best of us are more influenced by appearances than by reality, and beauty conquers easily where virtue fails to appeal.

“Oh, doctor, how is he?” said Evelyn, stretching out a limp hand.

“Better, my dear lady.” The doctor did not utter the brutal truth to the young wife; he was too good a physician to commit that clumsiness.

“Will he get well soon?” She signed to him to sit down beside her. “Mind you try to cure him quickly.”

“I will do my best, you may be sure. It’s the gout, you know, flying about the system—hereditary, and no mistake. Now let me feel your pulse—ah! quick and fluttering—you have had a shock.”

“Oh yes, doctor, a dreadful shock—it was awful”—Evelyn covered her face with her hands as if to shut out the horrid sight. Deeply printed on her memory was the picture of her husband’s distorted face, and the sound of the loud breathing, which resembled the groans of an animal.

“Well, you must keep quiet.” He retained his hold on her wrist and looked steadily into her face. “I will send you a composing draught, and to-morrow, I dare say, you will feel quite well again ——”

“And Sir Hilary, doctor?” she said, as he rose, “tell me really, will he recover? Oh, he cannot be so bad, so very bad, tell me truly”—the doctor drew on his gloves silently—“you will save him, you *must* save him,” her voice rang with petulant passion.

“I will do my best,” he said, gravely.

“Ah, I see you have no hope; oh, doctor, doctor.” She fell back on her pillows crying bitterly—now that she was likely to lose him, the worth of her husband suddenly appeared to her in a new and precious light.

“Do not distress yourself, dear lady—and have confidence in me—I am quite hopeful—oh yes, decidedly hopeful.” In such cases the doctor saw no harm in a white lie. It was absolutely necessary that the patient’s fears and nervousness should be relieved. “Now, my dear lady, if you fret like this you will positively make yourself ill, and that is wrong. You wish to nurse your husband, don’t you?” Evelyn answered

with a feeble yes—as a rule she dreaded the paraphernalia of sickness.

“Then you must keep calm; see now, have a cutlet and a glass of claret for your lunch, and then you will feel much stronger—I will call again in an hour or two—now, pray let me advise you—will you be guided by me?”

“Yes, doctor, yes,” she murmured, faintly.

“That’s right—I shall be here again in a couple of hours, and I trust we shall have better news then.” The doctor, pleased with his little manœuvre, and satisfied that Evelyn would carry out his suggestions respecting the luncheon, now bustled out to continue his less interesting rounds among his poorer patients.

Evelyn lay still and pondered. Her husband would die, she was sure he would die. And she must always feel herself his murderess. The rage and annoyance she had caused, whatever the doctor might say about gout, was the cause of his illness. If it had not been for her he might have lived many more years, and she would have been spared this sin on her conscience. She groaned. The attentive maid, who had been left with

her under special instructions from the doctor, brought her a glass of water. "Here, my lady, drink this, it will do you good." Evelyn pushed away the proffered glass with a pettish movement, and turned her face to the wall. Marie shrugged her shoulders, and, seating herself in the window, settled down to read an absorbing French novel which she had abstracted from her mistress's work-basket.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CIRCUMSTANCES decide character. Mrs. Vincent, with everything the world could give her, would probably have been an exemplary member of society. As it was, she was virtuous and outwardly pious. A good mother, a good wife, a sufficiently kind mistress; she dispensed charity with a lavish hand so long as it did not cost her any money, and never counted the time she spent in keeping the penny-bank, or making up the accounts of the village clothing-club. She was an active member of the girls' friendly society, started many a deserving servant on her path of service, and collected any amount of sixpences for the mission for civilizing the inhabitants of the South Sea Islands or the wilds of Africa, at the expense of infinite trouble and unceasing letter-writing. But she was deficient in one small item, an item which, unfortunately, does not

take the prominent place in a woman's mind that it does usually in a man's, the sense of honour. We have seen this already in the case of the anonymous letter which caused Sir Hilary so much doubt and unhappiness; and Mrs. Vincent had another secret also, of an even less honourable nature, which it is time to pry into. Mrs. Vincent was troubled with qualms of conscience occasionally; even with her self-righteousness and distinct approbation of her own actions there were moments when she was uncomfortable and afraid. Uncomfortable lest her secret should be discovered; afraid lest her carefully-laid plot should not succeed. Only one person in the world knew where the pearl-necklace was to be found, and that person was Mrs. Vincent. She knew it for the very excellent reason that she had herself locked it away in her dressing-case, of which she wore the small gold key, night and day, suspended round her neck. When Dick in his careless absorption forgot to deliver the necklace with which the jewellers had intrusted him, he returned home with the parcel in the pocket of his coat. There it had remained and been found by the servant, who atten-

tively placed it in a drawer. The following morning, when Dick had gone out, Mrs. Vincent, engaged in one of her usual prowls around, entered his room to see if she could find some sticking-plaster which she knew he possessed. Opening the drawer, the first thing that met her eyes was the parcel addressed to Lady Fenchurch, "With care, from Messrs. Cherry and Appleton." She at once thought she had lighted on a treasure. A present of jewellery from Dick to a married woman was a weapon indeed with which to wound Luce, to cause a breach between the engaged pair, to enrage Mrs. Carrol, whose sense of propriety was keen and delicate, and possibly to deprive Dick of his birthright in favour of her own children. Mrs. Vincent Carrol had something of the undeveloped morality of the savage, who thinks it wrong to injure one of his own family or people, but willingly massacres without compunction as many of a neighbouring and hostile tribe as he can conveniently manage. Dick was to her a hostile tribe, her children's enemy; and, as she plausibly argued, all is fair in love and war. Believing, therefore, that she had discovered

an important secret, she appropriated the parcel and proceeded to open it. When she beheld a valuable pearl necklace she was sorry she had done so; such a thing could not be a present from Dick, his year's allowance would scarcely have sufficed to buy it; besides, as he was extremely extravagant, the allowance was usually forestalled before it had been paid. Mrs. Vincent sat down in front of Dick's dressing-table, the necklace in her hand, and pondered deeply. If it were not a present from Dick it must be a present to Dick, and from exactly opposite premises she arrived at the same conclusion as Sir Hilary had done. Dick was in debt, and Lady Fenchurch was weak and foolish enough in her blind love to pay his debts with her own necklace. But he would naturally miss the parcel which he had placed there himself, doubtless thinking it a place of safety, and in that case how was she to account for having tampered with it? She thought at first of leaving it in the drawer and trusting to chance, but she felt that inquiries would be made, the servants suspected, and her indiscretion discovered. The safest course was to take the necklace

into her own possession, and leave no trace of its disappearance. Mrs. Vincent shut the drawer in which everything else was untouched, and hurried to her own room with her precious burden, fortunately meeting no one on her way. When the pearls were safely locked into her dressing-case, and the key securely hung round her neck, she breathed more freely. To no one would she impart a syllable of the truth, certainly not to foolish blabbing Vincent, and no one was likely ever to suspect her. If Dick missed the necklace he would not pay his debts, but by the same token he would not dare to speak of his loss, nor to boast of a present received from Lady Fenchurch. He would be forced to keep silence, and perhaps incur fresh difficulties which might finally exasperate his kind grandmother. He must already be in very great straits, or he would never have taken so valuable a contribution from a woman. Mrs. Vincent did not think it suspicious that he should descend to so mean an expedient; she thought that men, poor men especially, were capable of anything. She judged by her own petty shifts and the easiness with

which she had extracted little sums here and little sums there from Granny's ever ready purse, when in serious need of money. That Dick should do the same, and accept help where he found it, she judged extremely natural. Her intention was to drive him from lack of means into some such action which would compromise his future fortune. But she reckoned without her host. Dick did nothing desperate, and Granny pitied rather than blamed him. Still a scandal had been caused, he had been rendered very miserable, the confidence of the public in him was shaken, possibly the marriage with Luce might never take place. True, things had assumed a very different complexion from what she intended; she was permitting a man to suffer needlessly under a false suspicion, for with one word she could have cleared up everything, but she did not do so. She herself would have found it hard to explain her motives; she was not naturally cold or stony-hearted, and yet she quietly committed an unjustifiable action; and, though certainly a little uncomfortable in the process, felt no remorse for her conduct. She had gone too far; it was too late to

draw back. And meanwhile she could endure to see Granny day by day growing quieter and more silent; her smile—that peaceful heavenly smile Luce loved—getting rarer and rarer, until it became but a reflection of itself; and note the patient figure more and more motionless sitting for hours in her chair by the fire. Mrs. Vincent could bear to see this and to know that it was her doing, and never speak a word.

“It is for my children,” she would repeat to herself.

Dick never came to Long Leam now, his name even was scarcely mentioned between them; and yet each one in that divided household hung with anxious suspense upon every incident and suggestion that portended the result of the contested election.

Luce had obtained permission to spend the polling-day with Granny, and arrived the previous morning with a small handbag containing necessaries for the night. When she and Granny were alone they tasted a few moments of exquisite happiness though they were reticent in their expressions of joy, and indulged in few words; but Luce would sit on a low footstool at Granny’s feet, with her

hand clasped round the old lady's delicate shrunk fingers, and a cord of perfect sympathy seemed to bind their hearts together. Speech is the feeblest mode of expression between two entirely loving natures, thoughts lie far too deep for words, and certain moods and emotions defy all known reduction to the concrete.

Lady Eleanor had been more than usually fussy lately. She was annoyed at Luce's persistence in her engagement, notwithstanding all reasonable advice. She was alarmed at the consequences of Dick's losing his election and his grandmother's fortune; and at the terrible chance that possibly the warrant might be executed and the handsome young fellow imprisoned and disgraced; finally, she had discovered three or four grey hairs in her head, which she did not know she possessed, and had experienced certain twinges in the points of her fingers which her doctor had rudely, and without the courtesy to be expected of a lady's physician, pronounced to be gout. She was consequently of a more arrogant and difficult temper than usual; and Maud, who was now engaged in playing a new game, that of

making herself necessary at Highview Castle, encouraged and sided with her in all her fancies.

Luce, who was consistent and steadily practical, found it difficult to veer about with the wind of the fine lady's caprices. She would bluntly assert that the day was fine and the wind west when Lady Eleanor had announced that the weather seemed colder than ever, and that she was sure the thermometer had fallen ten degrees since the previous day, or disagree with Lady Eleanor's opinion that Dick's misfortunes arose from the spoiling of his grandmother, or assert her belief in his innocence when Lady Eleanor called him a rogue and a thief. Then her aunt would work herself up into a rage; and the twinges of gout grew worse, and the doctor ordered absolute quiet and a lowering diet, which was precisely what Lady Eleanor most detested, being under the impression, carefully encouraged by her kind husband, that it was "keeping up," her system required. Under these circumstances Luce would fall into dire disgrace and be ordered summarily from the room, probably to meet, on the stairs, Maud, happy

and officious, bustling along with a letter or a message.

“I have no patience with you, Luce,” she said, as she caught sight of a tear twinkling on Luce’s eyelash. “You are such a fool. Why don’t you let your aunt have her say? If she finds it cold, shut all the windows and doors; if she abuses Mrs. Carrol, say nothing if you can’t join in; ten to one if you *did* join in she would turn round and praise her. What’s the use of quarelling with your bread and butter? You should try, on the contrary, to spread your butter thicker.”

Luce only shook her head. It was impossible to her to go against her convictions, and she had not the gift in these moments of suspense and anxiety to stand outside herself, and reason lightly and sarcastically about her difficulties. Maud could do this. She could make Lady Eleanor laugh in the most trying moments, and keep her amused even in the long tiresome drives in a close carriage which were ordered for her health by the medical man. Naturally, therefore, a visit to Long Leam afforded a peaceful happy contrast to Luce’s daily life, of which

she availed herself whenever she had the opportunity. Mrs. Vincent, however, did not allow her more peace than she could help; she was unreasonably jealous of Luce's influence, and irritated at the non-success of her own daughters to interest and amuse the old lady; who, though ever kind and courteous, sometimes plainly showed her relief at their departure. She found fault as much as she dared with all Luce did; she kept the room far too hot or too cold, or else she talked too much and gave Granny a sleepless night, or she remained silent and thus caused Granny to be unusually depressed, and so on and so on. But Luce took it all gently and patiently; neither she nor Granny cared what price they paid for each other's company.

"And so you saw him to-day?" Granny said, pressing Luce's hand as she sat at her feet.

"Yes, when I passed through West Thorpe. He was in a carriage with two other gentlemen. He bowed and seemed pleased as he caught sight of me."

"Of course, dear—well?"

"But he looked so pale, and so worn."

"It will all be over to-morrow," sighed Granny.

"Yes; and, whichever way it turns out, I shall be glad. This suspense is terrible."

"Poor fellow! Luce, I must see him afterwards. Do you hear? I must. Never mind what Mrs. Vincent says. There might have been a reason against it formerly, but when the election is over there can be none."

"You shall see him," said Luce, quietly.

"Thank you, dear, it is very kind of you; in fact you are always kind to me, and Mrs. Vincent, though she means well, is a little trying; she cannot help it, poor dear, she is so devoted to her family."

"Does being devoted to one's family necessarily mean selfishness? It is very sad."

"Poor Mrs. Vincent! I do not think she is happy."

"She is fond of her husband."

"Oh, yes! and an excellent wife, I am sure. I have not a word to say against her. She is so careful of Vincent's money, and wishes her daughters to have every advantage."

"Which you pay for, Granny."

Their eyes met, and Granny smiled.

“That is what grandmothers exist for, my dear. We useless old women must find some way of benefiting our neighbours.”

“Useless! If only half the world did as much.” Luce pressed her lips to Granny’s hand.

“You will never forsake Dick, Luce; promise me that.” The old lady’s voice shook. “I know it is asking a great deal of a young thing like you, who ought to be free and happy; but, my dear, I feel you will be his salvation, and he is a good fellow, really. I am so very anxious about him.”

“I know, Granny.”

“And you are the kind of girl who understands self-sacrifice. You will always put the welfare of the man you love above your own interests,” she continued, anxiously.

“I will try,” said Luce.

“Promise me. I feel as if I should not live long, now ——No, don’t shake your head. I am very feeble; I can scarcely walk; and to think much makes my head ache; even Homer hurts my eyes now; I fell asleep over him yesterday. Luce, you are young, you must take up the thread of my life—be a guardian angel to Dick.”

“I will.”

“Promise to marry him if it is for his happiness. It will be for his happiness, I know.”

“I promise.”

“But, if circumstances render this impossible, promise that you will help him to do right, and to be happy—I want him to be happy.”

“I promise,” softly whispered Luce.

Luce bent her head as she said these words solemnly, and kissed Granny's hand. The old lady felt the dedication of herself in this simple action, and was silent, looking with approval at the slender figure beside her. The old Dresden clock on the high mantelshelf ticked loudly in the silence, and seemed with its loud voice to ratify the vow. Luce never forgot that instant: Granny's soft quavering voice; the big arm-chair in which she seemed but a small shrunken atom of pale lilac brocade; the quaint china, grotesque and valuable, that stood on each side of the clock; the two prints in oval gold frames, genuine Bartolozzis, that hung below; the fire of wood burning placid and ruddy; the bright clear winter sunshine

streaming into the cheerful room; the smell of the hyacinths on the writing-table, and her own words ringing slowly out upon the air—"I promise."

Come what might, she was Dick's now. Whether she married him, as was most probable, and shared his fortunes and his difficulties, or remained single all her life, a helpful humble old maid, her desire must be towards him, her efforts consecrated to his advantage, and her love for Granny bear fruit in self-denial and service for him.

At that moment Mrs. Vincent entered with a tray containing toast and beef-tea for Granny (she was very diligent while disregarding her mental wants to minister to her bodily ones), and no more was said on the subject; but Luce contrived to give Granny's hand a silent pressure which confirmed the old lady in her belief that Luce had accepted the trust, and would keep it sacredly.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE committee-rooms in West Thorpe were as full of the hum of business as a beehive. The doors leading to them slammed incessantly; person after person, common and gentle, pushed his way in, and sallied forth again anxious and absorbed. The great Mr. Gubbins was in his glory; everybody invited his advice or his opinion; he was consulted, asked for, and monopolised by each one in turn. Excitement was his element; he only really enjoyed himself in the din and turmoil of political warfare. There had already been a slight disturbance between the rival bodies of constituents in the streets. It was rumoured that worse disturbances impended, and that the military might require to be called out. Some of the nervous people shook their heads. Gubbins only rubbed his hands.

“Capital!” he said, “nothing like a disturbance to give importance to a candidate. It shows you have a very fair chance; or your opponents would not take the trouble to get up a row.”

A brass band careered under the windows at that instant, and its harsh and unlovely tones drowned the remainder of his sentence. He hurried to the window and stepped out on to the balcony.

“They are some of your supporters, Mr. Carrol—fine fellows, too; come along, say a few words to them from the balcony.”

Dick, pale and looking fatigued (he had had but little sleep all night), rose from the table where he was poring over accounts, calculations, reports, and letters, and followed his agent on to the balcony. As he appeared deafening shouts were raised, cat-calls heard, and a shower of stones and rotten eggs fell against the windows.

“Gentlemen,” said Dick, “I am proud to meet you all to-day.”

Fresh shouts and louder cries interrupted him. The mob had no inclination to listen; they had come to shout, they meant to shout, and shout they would. Dick was

forced to confine himself to elegant gesticulations, which served the purpose quite as well as speech. When he had been loudly cheered, and the groans and hisses more or less quelled, he retired from the balcony and returned to the comparative quiet of the writing-table.

“What tomfoolery it all is!” he said, wearily. “They don’t care a fig about me. I don’t believe I have a chance, and if it were not that I should hate to disappoint the honest Liberals who have stood by me so loyally, I should throw the whole thing up at the eleventh hour.”

“You need not be troubled by any scruples about your supporters,” said Gubbins, sarcastically, “so long as they get a candidate that’s all they want; it don’t much matter who it is; they’d as soon take me as you, if you were fool enough to retire, and in that case I should present myself at once, for they know me now; but I don’t recommend it.”

He turned again to the papers, and Dick felt that the laugh was on the agent’s side. The other men chuckled, the pluck of the fellow pleased them. Dick began to draw

little pictures on the blotting-paper; the noise and the worry irritated him. He thought of Luce, and wondered what she was doing. He longed to speak to her for one instant, to hear her low sweet voice, and see her eyes fixed on his face in quiet trust. She always put him in a good temper; she believed in him so thoroughly, and the belief was infectious. If he married her he should improve, he felt sure. She would help him to do right, and conquer the weakness that stole over him spite of his best endeavours. And then there was that Fenchurch business, too—how would that turn out? He must stand by Evelyn if there were any difficulties. While he reflected he continued to draw strange caricatures even more diligently; pretty women with fishlike extremities; hideous little goblins with huge mouths, and dancing devils with long tails, and monsters of every kind. The occupation soothed him. Presently some one looking over his shoulder while he drew said:

“That’s very like Lady Fenchurch, I declare. Just her eyes—by-the-bye isn’t this a sad affair about Sir Hilary? it improves your chance though, Carrol.”

“What affair?”

“Ah, yes,” chimed in Gubbins, “I heard it late last night. I forgot to mention it to you, Carrol. Sir Hilary had an attack yesterday, a kind of fit; they tried to keep it very quiet, but it oozed out through the fact of the doctor’s visit. However, I don’t suppose that will make much difference to the voting. Everyone has pretty well made up his mind by this time which way he is going to vote.”

“Sir Hilary is ill—has had a fit!” repeated Dick, slowly.

“Yes! he was getting fat, and there is gout in the family, so it is not surprising.”

“By Jove! you’re a lucky chap, Carrol.”

“It is extremely likely you will get in now,” said Mr. Highview, at that instant approaching.

“Is it not very sudden?” asked Dick, leaning back in his chair.

“Fits usually are very sudden—they don’t generally go through much ceremony.”

“Why you look almost sorry, Dick,” said Mr. Highview, kindly; “after the way you have been treated I must say you show a most forgiving spirit.”

“ I—the fact is, I am taken by surprise.”

“ So were we all. Is there fresh news this morning? does any one know how he is?”

No one knew for certain, though all kinds of rumours were understood to be floating in the air.

“ Here, George,” said Gubbins, authoritatively to a messenger, “ make it your business to find out, and bring us the latest bulletin of Sir Hilary’s condition. We can afford to pay him the compliment of being interested in his health, can’t we Carrol, eh?” he chuckled, satirically. These things were nuts to the agent. Dick nodded. Sir Hilary struck down with illness considerably enhanced his chances of success. Certainly he might consider himself fortunate. The subject dropped, other things were of more interest to the eager politicians—the state of the poll, the refractoriness of certain voters. But Dick could not get the thought out of his head. Sir Hilary at this instant was lying speechless, motionless, and helpless, and he, Dick, was on the high road to fortune. It almost seemed as though a special providence watched over the careless young

man. Some telegrams came flying in, technical questions required to be discussed; he again addressed the people from the balcony, and this time they condescended to listen more patiently; then arrived luncheon, more interviews, more business—he had no time to sit still, much less to think. Affairs were very promising. Dick was at the head of the poll, his opponent running him very close; the contest grew more and more exciting. George had not returned with news of Sir Hilary's health; indeed, in the growing suspense and interest the matter was almost forgotten. No one believed the illness to be very serious. Sir Hilary was still young, he was known to be a hearty man, who had lived a temperate life and taken plenty of exercise, the Englishman's panacea for all ills.

“Luce sent you her best wishes to-day,” whispered Mr. Highview as he sat next to Dick over their hurried luncheon.

“She is very kind,” responded Dick, with a smile of pleasure. “Where is she?”

“Nothing would satisfy her but she must spend to-day with your grandmother. Lady Eleanor was much against the plan, but Luce,

aided a little by me I must confess, overruled her. She slept at Long Leam last night and will be there till to-morrow."

"I am very glad. Granny will appreciate her society and the attention thoroughly."

"She is devoted to your grandmother. You might almost be jealous, Dick. You only come second-best I believe."

"Nothing is too good for Granny. Did Luce say anything about uncle Vincent? What part is he taking?"

"I regret to say he is in Sir Hilary's committee-rooms. I consider it very bad taste on his part, but with all due deference to you, Dick, your uncle never did give me the idea of a thorough gentleman. The first duty of a man who belongs to a good family, is in my opinion not to foul his own nest. What good can come of dragging a fine old name in the dirt?"

Dick's conscience smote him. He himself had not done much to raise the name. But if he triumphed now he meant to devote all his energies to cheering his grandmother's declining days, and to giving her the right of being proud of her grandson. Poor old lady, she had hitherto suffered terribly

through him. It should be his sole endeavour to comfort her and recompense her goodness and trust.

The hours sped along interminably as it seemed to him, in alternations of hope and disappointment. Sometimes he headed the poll, sometimes Sir Hilary headed it; it seemed that none could predict the result, the Conservatives were confident, the Liberals flushed with anticipation. Dick sat in a corner with his head on his hands waiting. There was nothing more to be done except to wait, and he was sick and tired of the whole concern; even if he were beaten he should not care very much so long as he were free again to do what he liked. The afternoon was cold; but the committee-room, filled with people as it had been all day, felt stifling and oppressive. A kind of dull quiet had settled upon everyone. Mr. Highview and Gubbins whispered together in a corner. Dick knew that it must be about something connected with his affairs, but he did not even care to listen. He pulled out his cigar-case and began to smoke. These tedious moments of expectation were the worst of all. The fire was dying out, the small bad

coal which had been piled upon it produced more dust and cinders than it gave out heat. Dick stooped and emptied the contents of the grimy coal-scuttle upon the fire, which immediately vomited forth volumes of dense choking smoke. "Oh, by Jove!" exclaimed Dick, walking disgustedly to the window. The streets were full of people, occasionally some one the worse for drink hiccupped and shouted as he walked along, but as a rule everything was quiet. The mob was tired, and the greater number had dispersed to their homes. Dick leant listlessly against the window-frame hearing the whispered conversation like a gentle echo behind him.

Suddenly a new excitement seemed to seize upon the people outside; they hurried together, and cheers and groans filled the air. Mr. Highview and Gubbins approached the window to see what was the matter, and George the messenger burst into the room at the same instant. He had evidently been running and could scarcely speak.

"What is it?" said those present, feeling certain that he was the bearer of some great piece of intelligence.

“ You’re all right,” he gasped at last, “ Sir Hilary ——”

“ Well, go on,” impatiently urged Gubbins.

“ Sir Hilary—I’ve just come from Oakdene—Sir Hilary is dead ! ”

“ Dead ! ” The faces round the table were a study. Gubbin’s positively glowed with unfeigned surprise and delight. Mr. Highview’s expressed genuine concern, for the sudden death of a brother magistrate in the prime of life was no light matter, while Dick was divided between a sense of horror and a sense of relief.

“ Well, our work is done at last,” said Gubbins, presently, “ there is no other candidate in the field, and, as it is, you head the poll, you see. I congratulate you, Carol, on your well deserved victory.”

He shook Dick’s hand, but the latter gave no sign of pleasure.

“ I’m glad you’re elected, my boy,” said Mr. Highview, kindly, “ but I’m sorry there has been such a tragic ending to the affair. Poor Sir Hilary ! he was a year or two younger than me, and who would have thought he would go first. Only fifty-five ;

why it's a terribly premature ending, and his young widow, too—dear, dear!”

Kind Mr. Highview continued lamenting in this strain for some time, while the agent and the other bystanders, who were conversant with the story of the necklace and Sir Hilary's revenge, looked with curiosity for Dick's answer. He seemed dazed. The whole affair was so sudden, his opponent had been snatched away just when he seemed likely to prove dangerous, and the ball was at Dick's feet. He was a Member of Parliament. Late that evening the full returns came in, and it was demonstrated, without doubt, by a considerable majority, that Dick was indeed the successful candidate. Even had Sir Hilary lived he would only have lived to see himself defeated.

“I owe everything to you,” said Dick to Gubbins, when he announced the result, “to the enormous trouble you have taken, and the way you coached up an inexperienced fellow like me, and, next to you, I owe everything to Mr. Highview.”

“No, no, indeed,” said the latter gentleman, “really I was of no use at all, but I am glad on account of Lady Eleanor; she will

be so pleased, she had set her heart on bringing in a Liberal candidate and she cannot bear to be disappointed. I must go home at once and tell her the news."

"And you will let Luce know," said Dick, anxiously; "I think she will be pleased too."

"Of course, but I suspect your uncle Vincent has seen to that already. It will be a blow to him, I suppose. A pity he did not support you; it is so much pleasanter when a family is not divided."

Saying this, good Mr. Highview departed in excellent spirits, secure as the bearer of pleasant news of an agreeable reception at the hands of Lady Eleanor.

Dick remained sitting by the fire; he smoked another cigar and drank a little brandy and water with Gubbins, who was too much elated to retire to bed, and entertained him for a couple of hours longer with stories of all the election dodges he had witnessed, and of the severe contests he had assisted at. "But I never was more pleased at any one's success than I am at yours," he concluded, pouring himself out a stiff tumbler of brandy and water. Dick, when at last his convivial companion permitted it,

threw himself perfectly exhausted on his bed and enjoyed short uneasy slumbers, in which he was perpetually addressing an angry mob that pelted him with garbage, and straining a hoarse voice from which not one audible note would proceed.

CHAPTER XX.

LUCE's stay at Long Leam during these events was no sinecure. Already the first evening at dinner, Mrs. Vincent took the opportunity of talking at her, conveying pointed allusions across the table to the innocent Dolly and Eliza, who had been promoted from the schoolroom to the dignity of a late dinner. Mr. Vincent, who had been drinking all day at the various public-houses in the pursuit of his electioneering duties, was voluble and argumentative, and perpetually informed her, in a loud and defiant voice, that the first duty of every man and woman was to stick up for the laws of his Queen and his country.

“The Liberals,” he said “all lie. They are nothing but a demagogy—a cruel, grinding, and tyrannical lot. Every Radical is a

tyrant; he deserves hanging. If I were the Queen I'd hang every one of 'em."

"Hush, dear, hush!" said Mrs. Vincent, carefully dispensing fish. "Here is your favourite cod and egg-sauce, and you must be hungry."

"So I am, as hungry as a hawk. Haven't I been all day shouting against those d——d Radicals, the scum of the people, which they're trying to foist upon us?"

"Well, dear, you might as well drop politics a little. Luce, you know, is shaking in her shoes."

Luce hastened to explain that she hoped Mr. Vincent would treat her as one of the family, and that she did not wish to be a check on the conversation.

"I hope we know better, my dear," said Mrs. Vincent, sarcastically, measuring out a small glass of sherry to be taken medicinally by Dolly, who, though a teetotaller, occasionally required a fillip, and was just now much distressed by a certain unseemly eruption on her face. "We all know how much you care for that misguided young man, who is standing to-day as a Liberal, more's the

pity. But what can you expect from a person who is a gambler?"

"Mrs. Vincent, indeed, I assure you ——"

"Excuse me, my dear, Vincent knows from sad experience how terribly he used to bet, and then, when the money is due, of course it has to be paid somehow, and people can't afford to be scrupulous."

Luce held her tongue. She did not wish to be drawn into any discussion which could only lead to angry expostulations, and serve no possible good purpose.

"Stick to the institutions of the country," blurted out uncle Vincent, in his drivelling tones. "That's the duty of every man and woman. The Tory party is a godsend to the country; you and I, and all of us, owe everything to the Tories, here's their health —bless 'em."

Uncle Vincent drank off a bumper of claret as he uttered these words, but a stern look from his wife caused him presently to subside into his plate of roast mutton.

"I do hope you will not agitate Granny," said Mrs. Vincent, turning to Luce. "It was a foolish business your coming here at all, to talk of distressing subjects, and re-

mind her perpetually of the disgrace that has fallen upon her family. I do all I can to keep her quiet, but now you are come I expect my pains will be wasted."

"Indeed, Mrs. Vincent, I do not believe I shall agitate her, and I think she finds it a comfort to have me by her side."

"Humph! I am sure I have spared no trouble to please her, and as for her broth and her gruel they have been first-rate, never smoked or lumpy, I took care of that, and I know how difficult it is to have nice gruel, even in the best houses, where these things are left to the stillroom maid, and always done carelessly."

"I am sure you have been very kind."

"I tell you what it is, Maria," said Vincent, "it's my belief a good glass of port wine would do Granny more good than all your slops."

"Now, Vincent, pray don't interfere; if there is anything I understand thoroughly it is nursing. Don't you remember when Tommy had the measles, and Dolly the scarlet fever, and you yourself that nasty bilious attack, that puzzled the doctors so, how dear Sir Calomel Mortar remarked with

a low bow—his bow is exquisite, really—that he had not a nurse to compare with me for attention and judgment?”

“Oh, I know you’re a great hand at boluses, the children know it too” (he looked round for approval, Dolly and Eliza sniggered and nudged one another under the table, it was the kind of joke they understood), “but I believe my mother wants nourishment more than physic.” That was Luce’s opinion also, and before she returned to Granny’s room she made friends with the butler, and persuaded him to give her a pint bottle of champagne and the wing of a chicken, armed with which delicacies she made her way to Granny’s bedside. The dear old lady lay quite still among her pillows; she only rose from her bed now for a few hours every day, and each time the exertion seemed greater. Mrs. Vincent occasionally accused her of laziness, and dilated on the waste of time caused by lying in bed, but, as she noticed Granny’s pale cheeks and feeble voice towards evening, she relaxed her urgency, and permitted the old lady to use her own discretion about her rest. On one thing however she was firm, and that was in the

matter of diet ; when people took no exercise she averred solid food must be partaken of sparingly ; indeed she attributed most illnesses to over-feeding and reckless indulgence in butchers' meat. Mrs. Vincent fed her servants and family now largely on fish ; she had read books advocating fish as an article of diet, and, finding it cheap and convenient, instituted a Friday fast as rigid as that of any Romanist faithful to the precepts of his confessor. Granny was only allowed slops, and wine was positively forbidden her. Luce knew this, and knew that by bringing contraband food she risked Mrs. Vincent's awful displeasure. But firm in her sense of right she braved it. When Granny saw the appetizing tray she smiled with pleasure and amusement.

“What's that for, dear?” she said, raising herself on her pillows ; “are you going to have supper ?”

“No, but you are, dear Granny ; now please eat just to satisfy me.”

Granny, a little alarmed at the prospect of Mrs. Vincent's return, at first demurred, but by dint of coaxing and entreaties Luce ma-

aged to prevail upon her to drink some wine and to eat a little of the chicken.

“I can’t think why the doctor doesn’t order you wine,” she said, sitting on the bed and cutting up the chicken daintily to save Granny trouble.

“The doctor, my dear? I don’t have him now; Mrs. Vincent dismissed him some time ago; he only prescribed plain food and quiet, and I get that.”

“I call chicken plain food, and so I am sure does he. Oh, Granny, it makes my heart ache to see you so quiet and uncomplaining,” said Luce, sadly.

“Well, dear, complaining would only make me worse; after all, an old woman of my age cannot expect much.”

“But you have enjoyed your little supper haven’t you now?” said Luce, carefully folding up the napkin and wiping away the crumbs that had fallen on the bed-clothes, “and you will sleep much better for it I’m sure.”

“I feel very well,” said Granny, rolling herself up cosily, “and rather like a child that has had a surreptitious feast.”

“Your eyes are as bright again; to-morrow dear Granny, we will have another feast.”

“Ah, yes, to-morrow, perhaps my dear boy will be an M.P. by that time.”

“Let us hope he will.” Luce kissed her and presently the old lady sank into a peaceful slumber. The next morning she seemed brighter than usual. Luce read the paper to her, and told her about all that went on in the house. How uncle Vincent had ridden off very early in the morning and had informed them of Sir Hilary’s illness, and how many bows of blue ribbon Mrs. Vincent and Dolly and Eliza had made up with their own hands to decorate themselves and their friends, and how Mrs. Vincent and the girls were going to drive in Granny’s carriage to West Thorpe in the afternoon, to hear the result of the polling, and how Luce herself, intended to stay at home all day and keep Granny company. The old lady was interested in everything, and pleased to hear the weather was fine though cold, and that the slight frosts of the past week had not hurt the peach-trees; and then Luce fetched her work, a piece of tapestry she was painting for the panel of Lady Eleanor’s boudoir,

and sat quietly down to a few hours' unobtrusive employment. As the day advanced Granny grew fidgety; she could have as much chicken and champagne as she chose in Mrs. Vincent's absence, but she felt no appetite, and would take nothing but her beef-tea; her hands had a visible nervous tremble in them which Luce had never before observed, and her voice, usually so low and sweet, to-day was tinged with querulousness. Luce felt a little anxious. She knew that this day of suspense would be a trial, and it was for that reason that she had wished to spend it with Granny, and to surround her with compensating kindness. Granny left her bed at luncheon-time, and Luce descended to the family meal while the old lady's toilet was performed by her faithful maid. Mrs. Vincent, dressed in a blue silk gown, was hurriedly eating her luncheon, talking and carving at the same moment.

“Make haste, Dolly, the carriage will be round directly, and you will not have finished. Have some cold meat, Eliza, you've eaten nothing! Help yourself, Luce, we are all in a hurry.”

Luce took her place quietly. "Never mind me, Mrs. Vincent, I shall do very well."

"And how is Granny? Keep her quiet, whatever you do. I don't suppose she really understands all that's going on, though—and a very good thing too—old people are generally supine."

"I think Granny is only anxious, and greatly feels the split in the family."

"Yes, of course, that her darling boy should turn out so badly must be disappointing. Now, wrap yourself up well, Dolly; put on the jacket with chinchilla; you know you had a cold last week."

At last Mrs. Vincent and her party departed, and Luce, having meekly received the final injunctions and recommendations shouted to her from the carriage window, slowly returned to Granny's room. Granny sat in her armchair by the fire, whence she could look out over the terraces and the smooth lawns and the water, to leafless woods beyond. "Are they gone?" said Granny, feebly; "how long they were. I thought the bustle would never be over."

"Did they disturb you, Granny? Well,

we shall be quiet enough now for the rest of the afternoon, you and I."

"Nothing disturbs me, but I shall be glad when to-day is over."

"Of course you will, Granny." Then there came silence. Luce's heart was almost too full to speak; she was with her lover in thought, sharing his agitation and suspense, intensified a thousand-fold by her vivid imagination. If prayers and wishes could bring a man success, Dick would certainly triumph before the evening. Luce looked upon him as a martyr to envy and ill-feeling, an innocent victim of some frightful misfortune or mistake; it was the principle that was at stake, not merely a party contest for the advantage of Tory or Liberal, but the question of a man's whole life, his honour and peace. Her own feelings need not be considered in the matter, she cared personally neither for the glories of debate nor for the applause of the senate, but she did care that Dick's character should be cleared, and a way opened for him to be good and honest and happy. Never were silent prayers offered with greater fervency nor did purer wishes emanate from a human

breast, than the petitions and aspirations that rose from the two anxious women, sitting together in that quiet room, one just entering upon, the other quitting, life, one stepping over the threshold of careless childhood, the other leaving behind her every stray glimmer of hope and illusion. Not a sound broke the silence; the red-hot coals dropped with an occasional thud into the marble grate below. and the slight noise seemed to startle the two patient watchers each time it occurred. Luce made up the fire, handed Granny her afternoon draught, and, as twilight came, pulled down the blinds, giving one last lingering look to the landscape she shut out; the shadow-like masses of the woods loomed dark and gloomy against the red sky, while, from the west, masses of threatening black cloud drifted up and a few snow-flakes began to float lightly down.

“I think we shall have a snow-storm,” said Luce, returning from her expedition to the window, and lighting a pair of candles, which she placed on a small table at Granny’s side.

“I hope Mrs. Vincent and the girls will

not be delayed in it; they ought to be home now, ought they not, Luce?"

"Very soon, Granny; we must not be too impatient you know, we cannot tell what may delay them; as long as there was something interesting to hear they would stay."

"Oh how dreadful it is to be helpless and old!" Granny gave a groan. Luce flew to her side.

"Dear, dear Granny, I am here; do let me be a help and a comfort to you."

"Yes, child, yes, but oh, my boy, my boy, why is he not here, why can't I welcome him and love him as I long to? Do you think he is unhappy, Luce?—say."

"I think he is too busy to be unhappy; remember he has a great deal to do; men are more fortunate in that respect than we are."

"He thinks I misjudge him, I am sure, yet I believe in his innocence most thoroughly and would give all I have to see him cleared. Tell him this, Luce, you will tell him when you see him; and besides to-morrow you must bring him to me."

"Yes, yes," said Luce, soothingly, "we must try to get him here to morrow."

Granny's strange excitement now abated

somewhat; she drank her tea reasonably, and became almost cheerful over the hot toast. A little later she complained of fatigue, and requested to be left alone.

“I will come and tell you the very moment I hear any news,” said Luce, cheerfully; she dared not anticipate the prospect of the news being bad. Luce ran lightly down stairs and listened a moment, looking over the banisters. The lamps were lit, but the house was wrapped in inexplicable silence. She made her way into the hall, where the queer old prints hung and the large marble-topped table stood littered with newspapers. Since Granny’s illness their number had greatly diminished. Mr. Vincent took in *The Field*, but the array of Dick’s sporting newspapers had vanished, and Mrs. Carrol’s *Spectator*, and *Academy*, and *Saturday Review*, were stopped from motives of economy. Mrs. Vincent’s sole literature consisted of *The Queen* and *The Christian World*. Luce took up *The Christian World*, and read marvellous accounts of “dealings” and “conversions,” but her mind received none of the sense though her eye wandered over the words. The long delay was so

strange—where could they be? She put down the paper and opened the front door carefully a few inches, a handful of cold snow was immediately blown into her face.

“Oh, if they should be delayed all night, and Granny linger on another twelve hours in suspense!” she thought with terror.

It was only eight miles to West Thorpe. Granny’s well-fed horses could trot over the ground in no time. Then why were they not here already? Action, toil, and labour—anything was better than this suspense. Hark! The old house-dog in the stables began to bark, yes, it was a sound of wheels deadened by the falling snow, but still sufficiently audible; presently the carriage stopped under the porch, and, as the footman jumped down to ring the bell, Luce threw open the door.

“What, Luce!” cried Mrs. Vincent’s shrill voice, “what do you mean by coming out in the snow like this, you’ll catch your death of cold.”

“Oh, Mrs. Vincent! tell me, tell me, please, quick, what has happened?”

“La, child! give me a moment’s time to breathe? I must shake the snow off my

cloak. Dear me, it is cold to-night. Vincent, take care of the step."

"What has happened?" pleaded Luce again, with trembling hands assisting Mrs Vincent to unrobe.

"I declare your fingers are all thumbs. Make haste, Dolly and Eliza! the draught is awful from that hall door."

"Oh! Mr. Vincent, please, has Dick been returned? What is the result of the election?" again asked Luce.

"Curse him, yes!" blurted out Mr. Vincent gruffly, going up to the table where the butler had placed some sherry and glasses.

"Returned! Really an M.P.!" cried Luce, her eyes dilating with surprised happiness. "Really, really, oh! what delicious news. I must fly to tell Granny."

"You can tell her that Sir Hilary is dead at the same time," observed Mrs. Vincent, coldly. "She will be glad to hear that her grandson has stepped into Parliament over a grave."

"A first-rate Conservative, and such a judge of horses!" mourned uncle Vincent, between his gulps.

“Dead! no, I will not tell her that, bad news can wait till to-morrow, but she shall know about Dick at once,” cried Luce.

Unheeding further remonstrances from Mrs. Vincent, Luce ran upstairs, joy lending wings to her feet, but stopped outside Granny’s door, to still the beatings of her heart. She must on no account startle Granny; she remembered a French play she had once read, “*La joie fait peur*”; she knew that sudden happiness might prove as fatal as sudden grief. Composing herself by an effort she turned the handle of the door gently, and walked quietly in. Granny sat in the chair as she had left her, her head thrown back on the pillow, her withered hands folded demurely in her lap, motionless.

“She is asleep,” said Luce; “shall I wake her, even to hear good news?”

She approached on tip-toe; the old lady’s face was calm as marble, the lashes had fallen over the tired eyes. “Granny!” softly whispered Luce. The voice was as soft as a breath of summer wind. The old lady did not stir. “Oh, Granny! good news, Dick has conquered.” Still no answer. “Granny, don’t you hear? Listen! we are all so happy.

Granny, dear Granny !” She came closer and took one of the small thin hands. “How cold you are, Granny !” then in a frightened and shriller voice, forgetting all her precautions, “Oh, Granny, do speak, speak to your little Luce; wake, Granny, wake.” Luce cried and begged—the obstinate sleeper never moved. “Oh, Granny, *do* wake.” Luce sank down and laid her head in the old lady’s lap. No gentle pressure rewarded her, no fond hand stroked her hair. Then Luce felt as if her heart would break, an awful terror encompassed her, the silence, the coldness, the rigid stillness, that stillness that is never found in life, terrified and awed her. She began, wildly and passionately, to kiss and press the withered unresponsive cheek, the cold lips, the motionless eyes; she sobbed and cried and entreated. “Granny, granny, hear me !” rang in louder and shriller accents through the room. Mrs. Vincent heard, and mounted the stairs to investigate. The cry of a human soul in agony was not one she was accustomed to. She did not approve, nor would she encourage, any unwonted show of emotion. It savoured too much of the old rebellious Adam, which in

well-brought up girls was not becoming. On the threshold she paused. The cry had ceased. The echo of her own footfall nearly startled her, for the wings of death have a wide and soothing sweep. She looked again. Granny had passed into the everlasting silence, and Luce, crouched together, now stopped her moaning, and lay dumb and motionless at her feet. Even Mrs. Vincent was awed. She closed the door gently, and went away without speaking.

END OF VOL II.



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